

VIRGIL'S FIRST CHRISTMAS

by Eddie McPherson



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Virgil's First Christmas

A hillbilly Christmas comedy

by Eddie McPherson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

VIRGIL: Good old country boy from the sticks

MARGARET: His good-natured better half

ELMER: Virgil's first cousin who gets these "ponderings"

MRS. TISHWATER: The church's very own hypocrite

MR. TISHWATER: Mrs. Tishwater's hen-pecked husband

TISHA TISHWATER: Their spoiled daughter

IMA FORD: Mrs. Tishwater's uppity singing sister

REVEREND DAVIS: Pastor of First Church, a man with heart

BRITTANI: Level-headed eight-year-old daughter of Rev. Davis

ROBERT: Tisha's newest project – uh, boyfriend

MR. WILSON: The church's music director

EXTRAS / BIT PARTS: Announcer, Lady, Man, People of the church (can also double as Elmer's family at end of play)

3
PRODUCTION NOTES

SYNOPSIS

Virgil and Margaret have attended First Church since Easter. The parish's home-grown hypocrite Mrs. Tishwater and her spoiled daughter Tisha still haven't gotten used to the idea that two such backward and socially unacceptable hayseeds would want to attend an upper-crust congregation like First Church. But Virgil and Margaret have loved every minute of their association with the church, oblivious of the Tishwaters' attempts to oust them time and time again.

Mrs. Tishwater has taken it upon herself this Christmas to invite her high-society sister from out of town, Ima Ford, to sing a Christmas concert at First Church (without letting anyone know about it, of course). There's something she must do first: Make sure Virgil and Margaret don't attend church this particular Sunday. Having her sibling meet these social outcasts would just be too much for Ima's delicate heart. But when Reverend Davis, the church's pastor, finds out about the Tishwater's scheme, he decides to devise his own plan: Virgil and Margaret *will* be at church on Sunday, but will Mrs. Tishwater know it?

There are four scenes taking place in three different locations: Near baggage claim in an airport (A sign reads: "Fly On the Wings of An Eagle: Eagle Airlines"), inside Reverend Davis's office, and the sanctuary of First Church. (If you wish, Scene 2 could take place in the sanctuary instead of the office.) Keeping the scenery and sets simple is OK. Make them merely suggestive of the actual locations, and the audience will accept that without a problem.

EASY-TO-OBTAIN PROPS

Bags of popcorn, suitcases (including one that is pink), two paper cups in a cardboard drink holder, trash can, purse for Ima, long piece of toilet tissue, golf club and ball, plastic cups, simple poinsettia arrangement, larger flower arrangement, coin, rubber ducky, handkerchiefs, small photo album, sheet music, gift boxes and bags, Bibles, hymn books, bottle of pills, notebook and pen, fifty-dollar bill (fake), bridal magazine, various jingle bells.

COSTUMING SUGGESTIONS

Virgil and Elmer wear country clothes such as overalls, flannel shirts, blue jeans, work boots, etc. Margaret may wear a simple dress made of cotton or gingham. Once they "transform" into the clothing Reverend Davis gives them, Virgil and Elmer wear nice shirts and slacks. Ties and dress jackets complete the look. Margaret wears a nice-fitting, stylish dress.

Everyone at the church dresses nicely in their Sunday attire. Mrs. Tishwater, Tisha, and Ima should adorn themselves with fine furs and elaborate jewelry. Mrs. Tishwater needs a watch. It's OK for these three to go over the top with their accessories. Fancy hats with feathers may even be a nice finishing touch. Reverend Davis wears a nice suit or robe. Elmer's friends at the end dress like Elmer before his transformation.

The playwright wishes to acknowledge the Mt. Pisgah Wesleyan Church of East Smithfield, Pennsylvania, which staged the first performance of *Virgil's First Christmas* with the following cast and stage crew:

Virgil	Scott Walrath
Margaret	Melissa Beeman
Elmer	Wayne Beeman
Mrs. Tishwater.....	Jill Cole
Mr. Tishwater	Rev. Lynn Ensign
Tisha Tishwater	Lisa Braund
Ima Ford.....	Raychel Holcomb
Robert (Tisha's Boyfriend)	Jan Vosburg
Reverend Davis	Matt Hoose
Brittani	Meagan Nowacoski
Mr. Wilson	Chuck Stringham

Extras: Dana Fay, Cindy Coolbaugh, Annette Patton, Alex Cuno, Joe Cuno, Emilie Cole

Directed by Christina Sheeley
 Produced by Jean Fay and Trudy Sheeley
 Lighting and Sound Design: Aaron Sheeley and Clint Nichols
 Costumes and Alterations: Jean Fay
 Program and Poster Printing: Russ and Lori Brelsford, Ad Graphics
 Advertising: Lori Hoose
 Original Art: Wayne Beeman
 Prompter: Marsha Ensign
 Stage Crew: Curt Card, Steve Moody, Nate Coolbaugh, Paul Sheeley
 Photography: Heather Moody and Toby Cole
 Hair and Makeup: Marsha Card

Scene 1

(Near baggage claim in an airport. A sign reads: Fly On the Wings of An Eagle: Eagle Airlines. MRS. TISHWATER and her husband are waiting for her sister's anticipated arrival. MR. TISHWATER sits on a piece of luggage, eating popcorn from a bag. MRS. TISHWATER looks at her watch.)

MRS. TISHWATER: It shouldn't be long now. Aren't you excited, Frederick? (He shakes his head, his mouth full of popcorn.) Whose luggage are you sitting on? Get up from there at once.

MR. TISHWATER: (With his mouth full of popcorn) I'm tired.

MRS. TISHWATER: You get great joy out of embarrassing me in public. Some poor soul is probably looking for his luggage.

MR. TISHWATER: If someone comes after it, I'll get up.

MRS. TISHWATER: (Frazzled) Oh, Frederick — really.

MR. TISHWATER: And stop calling me Frederick. You know good and well my name is Clifford.

MRS. TISHWATER: (Rushing to him) Hush! Do you want the whole world to hear? No one with any social status is named Clifford. When we are out in public, you will answer to Frederick. (She rolls her Rs.)

MR. TISHWATER: My name is Clifford!

MRS. TISHWATER: Why, oh, why did I have to settle for second best on my wedding day? Mother told me to marry Lawrence Beckett, the medical student. To think I could be living in the lap of luxury!

MR. TISHWATER: Well, you married me, so you'll have to be satisfied with sitting at luxury's feet. (Beat) Where is that battleaxe sister of yours? I'm ready to go home.

MRS. TISHWATER: I will not allow you to speak of my only sibling in such a crass manner. You be nice to her. (Grabs his bag of popcorn.) Give me that! And look at you! I swear I have married a total slob. For the last time, get

- 1 off that piece of luggage. *(She throws the bag of popcorn*
 2 *into a nearby waste basket. MR. TISHWATER reluctantly*
 3 *stands.) And tuck in your shirt!*
- 4 ANNOUNCER: *(From Off-stage)* Flight 724 now arriving.
 5 Flight 724 now arriving.
- 6 MRS. TISHWATER: That's sister's flight! I'm so nervous.
 7 *(Brushes MR. TISHWATER'S lapel.) Frederick, stand up*
 8 *straight. (Shouting to Off-stage) Tisha, dear — over here!*
- 9 TISHA: *(Entering with two cups of coffee)* Here's your coffee,
 10 Mummy — just the way you like it. *(Hands MRS.*
 11 *TISHWATER one of the cups.)*
- 12 MR. TISHWATER: Good. That popcorn made me thirsty.
 13 *(TISHA hands her father the cardboard container as she takes*
 14 *the other cup of coffee.)*
- 15 MRS. TISHWATER: There's no time to sip coffee now; your
 16 Auntie Ima's plane just landed. *(MR. TISHWATER goes for*
 17 *his wife's coffee, but she pitches it into the trash can.)*
- 18 MR. TISHWATER: That was perfectly good coffee.
- 19 MRS. TISHWATER: *(To TISHA, as she pulls her away from MR.*
 20 *TISHWATER)* Did you remember to talk to Virgil and
 21 Margaret?
- 22 TISHA: Yes, Mummy — don't worry. Virgil and Margaret will
 23 *not* be at church this Sunday.
- 24 MR. TISHWATER: What did you say?
- 25 MRS. TISHWATER: *(Trying to hide guilt)* What, dear?
- 26 MR. TISHWATER: What are you two scheming?
- 27 MRS. TISHWATER: *(Nervous)* Oh, Frederick — whatever do
 28 you mean?
- 29 TISHA: Frederick? I thought his name was Reginald today.
- 30 MR. TISHWATER: You're changing the subject. Are you
 31 trying to keep Virgil and Margaret away from church
 32 this Sunday because your sister —
- 33 MRS. TISHWATER: *(Laughing it off)* Frederick, you are so
 34 suspicious. *(Takes the popcorn out of the trash and speaks to*
 35 *her husband as though he's a child.) Here you go. Sit down*

1 on this comfortable piece of luggage and eat your
2 popcorn.

3 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*Holding up the popcorn*) I can not believe
4 you just did that. (*Beat*) What about the coffee? (*She*
5 *retrieves the coffee cup from the trash can and hands it to*
6 *him.*)

7 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Here, now please be quiet.

8 **MR. TISHWATER:** Whatever evil plan you two are dreaming
9 up — I don't like it. (*Stuffs his mouth with popcorn.*) I don't
10 like it, I don't like it. (*MRS. TISHWATER turns to her*
11 *daughter and gives her the "OK" sign. An Off-stage voice is*
12 *heard.*)

13 **IMA:** (*Off-stage*) Elizabeth, is it you? (*MRS. TISHWATER turns*
14 *and looks Off-stage. IMA runs in with a small bag on her*
15 *shoulder. They almost embrace, but stop and perform an air*
16 *kiss instead.*)

17 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Merry Christmas, Sister! It's been soooo
18 long.

19 **IMA:** Merry Christmas! It's been a long time.

20 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Ages.

21 **IMA:** I can't remember the last time.

22 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Ages, ages, ages. Tisha, come say hello to
23 your Auntie Ima.

24 **IMA:** This can't be little Tisha Tishwater. Why, the last time
25 I saw you, you were this high. (*Makes hand motion to*
26 *height of a child.*)

27 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Well, it *has* been a long time.

28 **IMA:** It's been soooo long.

29 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Ages.

30 **IMA:** I can't remember the last time.

31 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*Fed up*) Yeah, yeah, it's been a long time,
32 we get it.

33 **MRS. TISHWATER:** (*Shoots a hard stare his way.*) Ima, dear,
34 you remember Frederick?

35 **IMA:** I thought his name was Beauregard.

- 1 MRS. TISHWATER: Oh, no! Beauregard was years ago. Today
 2 it's Frederick Reginald Tishwater the Third.
- 3 MR. TISHWATER: Third?
- 4 MRS. TISHWATER: (*Quickly changing the subject*) How was
 5 your flight, dear?
- 6 IMA: Thank heaven I was riding first class, or I don't think
 7 I would have made it.
- 8 MRS. TISHWATER: First class on Eagle Airlines is the only
 9 way to fly.
- 10 MR. TISHATER: (*Sarcastically*) Oh yes, we always ride first
 11 class any time we flitter off to Paris on one of our many
 12 overseas excursions.
- 13 MRS. TISHWATER: (*Taking IMA's arm*) Come along, dear, and
 14 we'll pick up your luggage.
- 15 IMA: I do need to go to the powder room first. I won't be but
 16 a moment. (*Waves.*) Tootles. (*Exits Stage Right.*)
- 17 MRS. TISHWATER and TISHA: (*Together*) Tootles.
- 18 MR. TISHWATER: (*High-pitched voice*) Tootle-loooo. (*MRS.*
 19 *TISHWATER rushes to MR. TISHWATER.*)
- 20 MRS. TISHWATER: Listen, dear — be a good husband and
 21 run over to baggage claim and bring Ima's luggage, will
 22 you?
- 23 MR. TISHWATER: I don't know what it looks like.
- 24 MRS. TISHWATER: You can't miss it. She carries the same
 25 suitcase she's had for years. It's pink with a red handle.
 26 That's a good husband. (*Waves him off.*) Tootle, tootle.
- 27 MR. TISHWATER: OK, but *don't* touch the popcorn. (*He exits*
 28 *as TISHA and MRS. TISHWATER huddle Center Stage.*)
- 29 MRS. TISHWATER: We almost blew our plan.
- 30 TISHA: Sorry, Mummy.
- 31 MRS. TISWATER: But you *did* talk to them?
- 32 TISHA: (*Nods.*) Last night. I told Virgil and Margaret
 33 Christmas services were canceled due to the church's
 34 furnace breaking down.
- 35 MRS. TISHWATER: I hate to take such drastic measures to

1 keep them away, but I just don't think my sister would
2 understand. She's used to singing for, well, people who
3 can appreciate her rare talent.

4 TISHA: It's clear that Virgil and Margaret wouldn't
5 understand Auntie's formal singing style. If there isn't a
6 fiddle involved, they're lost.

7 MRS. TISHWATER: We can't allow your father to know what
8 we're up to, or he'll never allow us to see our plan
9 through.

10 TISHA: Auntie will only be here a few days, so our plan is
11 fail proof.

12 MRS. TISHWATER: I can't wait to hear Sister's solo. She
13 truly has the voice of an angel.

14 TISHA: The personification of style and elegance. (*IMA*
15 *reenters with a long piece of toilet tissue hanging off her*
16 *purse.*)

17 IMA: Well, here we are — nice and refreshed. Where's
18 Beauregard?

19 MRS. TISHWATER: Who?

20 IMA: Reginald?

21 TISHA: Frederick.

22 MRS. TISHWATER: He's over at baggage claim retrieving
23 your luggage. (*MR. TISHWATER enters dragging a large*
24 *pink suitcase.*)

25 MR. TISHWATER: Here we go, and it's all in one piece.

26 IMA: (*Pointing at the luggage*) What's that?

27 MR. TISHWATER: Your luggage.

28 IMA: This isn't my luggage.

29 MRS. TISHWATER: But it's pink.

30 TISHA: With a red handle.

31 IMA: I got rid of that old ugly thing years ago.

32 MR TISHWATER: If it isn't yours, then whose — (*A rather*
33 *aggressive-looking LADY with a funny hat enters and stomps*
34 *to MR. TISHWATER and grabs the handle of the luggage.*)

35 LADY: Give me my luggage, you thief. You're lucky I didn't

1 **call the authorities.** (*She takes his popcorn bag and dumps*
 2 *it on top of his head, then exits with her luggage.*)

3 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*As he turns back to his wife*) **It must have**
 4 **been hers.**

5 **IMA:** Come, Beauregard — I'll show you which luggage is
 6 mine. (*She crosses in front of him as she exits. He sees the*
 7 *toilet tissue, covers his mouth with his fingers, and laughs.*)

8 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Shut up, Frederick. Come! (*She exits.*)

9 **MR. TISHWATER:** It's Reginald! (*Then to himself*) I mean,
 10 Clifford. (*Rushes to TISHA.*) Tisha, why were you and
 11 your mother talking about Virgil and Margaret?

12 **TISHA:** (*Innocently*) Why, whatever do you mean? Come,
 13 Reginald. (*She exits.*)

14 **MR. TISHWATER:** But — (*He starts to exit, but the pink suitcase*
 15 *LADY re-enters with her suitcase as well as a smaller one and*
 16 *stands in his way.*) **I was just going to sit down.** (*He sits on*
 17 *the piece of luggage from earlier. She exits. A gruff*
 18 *lumberjack-sized man enters and crosses to MR.*
 19 *TISHWATER.*)

20 **MAN:** You're sittin' on my luggage. (*Pause*) I'd suggest you get
 21 up, or I'll be on you like a swarm of bees. (*MR.*
 22 *TISHWATER hops up. MAN grabs his suitcase and exits. The*
 23 *ladies' voices are heard from Off-stage.*)

24 **MRS. TISHWATER, IMA and TISHA:** (*Each takes a name and*
 25 *says in unison*) **Oh, Beauregard! Reginald! Frederick!**
 26 (*Defeated, MR. TISHWATER looks into his empty popcorn*
 27 *bag, slumps his shoulders, and exits. Christmas music plays*
 28 *for scene change.*)

29

30

31

Scene 2

32

33 (*It's the same day, later that afternoon in REVEREND*
 34 *DAVIS's office [or church's sanctuary] at First Church. He's*
 35 *holding a golf club and trying to hit a golf ball into a tiny*

1 *cup. He taps the ball but misses. He resets the ball and tries*
 2 *again and misses. He makes sure no one is looking and, with*
 3 *his foot, pushes the ball into the cup.)*

4 **REV. DAVIS:** *(Fist in air)* **Yes!** *(REV. DAVIS's eight-year-old*
 5 *daughter BRITTANI enters with a small poinsettia*
 6 *arrangement.)*

7 **BRITTANI:** Hi, Dad.

8 **REV. DAVIS:** Pumpkin, did you see Daddy make that last
 9 shot?

10 **BRITTANI:** No sir.

11 **REV. DAVIS:** Good girl.

12 **BRITTANI:** Mom asked me to bring in the bouquet for
 13 Sunday morning.

14 **REV. DAVIS:** Thanks, sweetie. Just set it there.

15 **BRITTANI:** Dad, when did you start playing golf?

16 **REV. DAVIS:** Ten minutes ago. It's supposed to relieve stress.

17 **BRITTANI:** Oh.

18 **REV. DAVIS:** See? *(He hits the ball and it misses again. He speaks*
 19 *to the ball.)* You're supposed to go in the cup, you dummy
 20 of a ball!

21 **BRITTANI:** It doesn't sound like you're relieving much stress.

22 **REV. DAVIS:** You're right, Brittani. Maybe I need to take up
 23 something less stressful — like brain surgery. *(VIRGIL*
 24 *sticks his head inside the door.)*

25 **VIRGIL:** Knock, knock — it's just me, Brother Reverend.

26 **REV. DAVIS:** Virgil! Come in, come in.

27 **VIRGIL:** *(Entering with MARGARET)* He says to come on in,
 28 Margaret!

29 **BRITTANI:** Hello, Virgil, Margaret. *(She crosses to MARGARET*
 30 *and takes her hand.)*

31 **VIRGIL:** Why, if it ain't little Brittani. What's this behind your
 32 ear? *(He pulls out a coin.)* I do believe it's a shiny new
 33 quarter.

34 **BRITTANI:** *(Taking the quarter)* Thanks, Virgil.

35 **MARGARET:** Virgil, you never did show me how to do that.

- 1 VIRGIL: It's a secret, honeydew.
- 2 MARGARET: Let me try it. (*She reaches behind BRITTANI's*
3 *ear.*) I do believe I see a shiny new quarter. (*She pulls out*
4 *a rubber duck.*)
- 5 BRITTANI: Wow!
- 6 MARGARET: See, I told you I couldn't do it.
- 7 REV. DAVIS: How did you ... ?
- 8 VIRGIL: That's not bad, Margaret.
- 9 MARGARET: (*Referring to the golf equipment*) What's that
10 there, Rev. Davis?
- 11 REV. DAVIS: A new hobby I just picked up. (*VIRGIL holds up*
12 *one of the clubs as REV. DAVIS points to it.*) You shoot golf
13 with it.
- 14 VIRGIL: You shoot with it? (*Takes it and holds it up like a rifle.*)
- 15 MARGARET: Virgil, don't shoot that thing in here, it might
16 be loaded.
- 17 REV. DAVIS: You don't under —
- 18 VIRGIL: It don't even have a trigger. How in tarnation do
19 you shoot?
- 20 REV. DAVIS: (*Interrupting*) You're right, Virgil — I'll just put it
21 up for now. What can I do for you?
- 22 VIRGIL: Nothin' a-tall, it's what *we* can do for you. We came
23 to fix the church's furnace.
- 24 REV. DAVIS: But the furnace isn't broken.
- 25 MARGARET: It ain't? Well, don't that fry your tater!
- 26 REV. DAVIS: Who told you the furnace was broken?
- 27 VIRGIL: Tisha Tishwater.
- 28 MARGARET: She told us you was forced to cancel Christmas
29 services because the heat went out.
- 30 REV. DAVIS: (*To himself*) She did, did she? They're at it again.
- 31 VIRGIL: Did you say somethin', Brother Reverend?
- 32 REV. DAVIS: Nothing, Virgil.
- 33 VIRGIL: We even brought Cousin Elmer with us to help fix
34 it.
- 35 REV. DAVIS: Cousin Elmer?

- 1 VIRGIL: Yes sir, Cousin Elmer is handy with a set of tools.
2 REV. DAVIS: (*Looking around*) Where is he?
3 VIRGIL: (*Turns around.*) He's right behind — I swear, that boy
4 is slower than a mud slide in February. Now, where did
5 that knucklehead go? (*Shouts.*) Cousin Elmer!
6 MARGARET: (*To REV. DAVIS*) Cousin Elmer don't talk much.
7 REV. DAVIS: Is he shy?
8 VIRGIL: Does a chicken have lips?
9 BRITTANI: No.
10 VIRGIL: (*Scratching his head*) It don't, does it? Well, there goes
11 my anthology.
12 REV. DAVIS: You mean analogy.
13 MARGARET: You have an allergy?
14 REV. DAVIS: No, I was referring to Virgil's analogy.
15 VIRGIL: I don't have an allergy.
16 REV. DAVIS: The *chicken* analogy.
17 MARGARET: I didn't know chickens could get —
18 REV. DAVIS: (*Putting up his hand*) Never mind, Virgil. But
19 Tisha was wrong. There's nothing wrong with the
20 church's furnace.
21 VIRGIL: (*Crossing to the door*) Cousin Elmer, come on in here.
22 Nobody's goin' to bite you. (*He pulls ELMER in. ELMER*
23 *keeps his head bowed and his hands in his pockets.*) Brother
24 Reverend, Brittani, this is my Cousin Elmer. Second
25 cousin on my mama's side. This here is our preacher and
26 his little girl, Brittani.
27 REV. DAVIS: It's nice to meet you, Elmer. (*ELMER shakes his*
28 *hand but doesn't lift his head.*)
29 BRITTANI: Hi, Elmer.
30 MARGARET: Say howdy, Cousin Elmer.
31 ELMER: (*Quickly*) Howdy.
32 MARGARET: He's *real* shy.
33 VIRGIL: But sometimes if you get quiet and the inspiration
34 hits him just right, Cousin Elmer can rattle off some real
35 profound ponderin's.

- 1 MARGARET: Shhh, he's got that ponderin' look in his eye
2 right now. (*ALL stare at ELMER.*)
- 3 ELMER: (*Slowly raising his head*) If we ain't supposed to eat
4 animals, why are they made out of meat? (*Bows his head*
5 *again.*)
- 6 VIRGIL: (*Deep contemplation*) If we ain't supposed to eat
7 animals, why are they made out of meat?
- 8 MARGARET: Now, that's deep, Reverend Davis — real deep.
- 9 VIRGIL: You might want to preach on that some Sunday.
- 10 REV. DAVIS: I'm making a mental note.
- 11 VIRGIL: Cousin Elmer, it don't look like we're goin' to be
12 needin' your toolbox after all. Seems the furnace ain't
13 broke.
- 14 ELMER: (*Head still bowed*) OK.
- 15 MARGARET: Bless his soul, he sure was lookin' forward to
16 fixin' your furnace. It's OK, Cousin Elmer — I'll break
17 somethin' when we get back to our house and let you fix
18 it right up.
- 19 ELMER: (*Head still down*) OK.
- 20 REV. DAVIS: I'll see you and Margaret at our Christmas
21 service, won't I, Virgil?
- 22 VIRGIL: Yes sir, we'll be here with tails on.
- 23 REV. DAVIS: You mean bells.
- 24 VIRGIL: I beg your pardon?
- 25 REV. DAVIS: You meant to say you'll be here with *bells* on.
- 26 MARGARET: Don't be silly. Why would we wear bells to
27 church?
- 28 VIRGIL: We'd jingle all the way through the service.
- 29 REV. DAVIS: You see, when someone can't wait to go
30 somewhere, they say, "I'll be there with *bells* on."
- 31 VIRGIL: What do you know about that? (*Snickers.*) Bells.
- 32 MARGARET: (*Noticing ELMER is raising his head again*) Virgil!
33 (*Points to ELMER as everyone stares at him.*)
- 34 ELMER: If a pig loses its voice, is it disgruntled? (*He bows his*
35 *head again.*)

- 1 VIRGIL: (*In awe*) Is it disgruntled ...
- 2 MARGARET: That's somethin' to really ponder.
- 3 VIRGIL: If you want Cousin Elmer to fix the trigger on your
- 4 golf rifle, just give me a shout. I guess we'll be runnin'
- 5 along. Elmer needs to get home and study more
- 6 ponderin's.
- 7 BRITTANI: Dad, we should invite their Cousin Elmer to the
- 8 Christmas service.
- 9 REV. DAVIS: What do you say, Virgil? Would Elmer like to
- 10 come with you?
- 11 VIRGIL: I've asked him a hundred times, but he says he ain't
- 12 quite ready to come to a place with so many people. I've
- 13 asked him and asked him and asked him, and he always
- 14 says no. Ain't that right, Cousin Elmer?
- 15 ELMER: (*Raises his head.*) I'll come. (*Bows again.*)
- 16 MARGARET: He will?
- 17 VIRGIL: He will? It's all settled then. We'll all three see y'all
- 18 bright and early Sunday mornin'.
- 19 REV. DAVIS: Nice to have met you, Elmer.
- 20 ELMER: (*Raising his head*) If corn oil comes from corn, where
- 21 does baby oil come from?
- 22 VIRGIL: Goooooollll-eeee.
- 23 MARGARET: Deep, deep, deep. (*VIRGIL, MARGARET, and*
- 24 *ELMER exit.*)
- 25 BRITTANI: Dad, I like them; they're funny.
- 26 REV. DAVIS: They're good people, pumpkin. No matter what
- 27 you hear people say, you always remember that.
- 28 BRITTANI: You mean people like the Tishwaters?
- 29 REV. DAVIS: (*Takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipes his*
- 30 *forehead.*) Don't worry about the Tishwaters. I think
- 31 they'll come around to our way of thinking soon enough.
- 32 The Lord has a way of dealing with people like that.
- 33 BRITTANI: I hope so. Every time you hear their name, you
- 34 start sweating something awful.
- 35 REV. DAVIS: Yes, well — the Tishwaters don't have to know

- 1 that. Let me try this golf ball one more time. (*He hits the*
2 *ball and it goes past the cup.*) Whoever said golf is a
3 relaxing sport never tried to hit it into that dumb cup.
4 Honey, you'd better get going. Your mother is waiting.
5 BRITTANI: OK. 'Bye, Dad — see you at home. (*MRS.*
6 *TISHWATER sticks her head in the door.*)
7 MRS. TISHWATER: Hello, hello. Rev. Davis? (*She enters.*)
8 BRITTANI: Hello, Mrs. Tishwater.
9 MRS. TISHWATER: Yes, yes, run along and play like a good
10 little girl.
11 BRITTANI: I'm not a little —
12 REV. DAVIS: (*Quickly, to BRITTANI*) Pumpkin, we don't want
13 to keep your mother waiting. 'Bye now.
14 BRITTANI: 'Bye. (*She exits, squinting her eyes at MRS.*
15 *TISHWATER. IMA enters.*)
16 MRS. TISHWATER: Rev. Davis, I'd like you to meet my
17 distinguished and talented sister, Ima Ford.
18 REV. DAVIS: It's very nice to meet you, Mrs. Ford. I'm
19 Reverend —
20 MRS. TISHWATER: (*Cutting him off*) My sister has quite an
21 impressive resume. She has performed at First Church
22 of Pine Valley in Cincinnati, Second Church of Hillgrove
23 in Los Angeles —
24 REV. DAVIS: That's very impress —
25 IMA: (*Interrupting*) You'll have to excuse my sister. I'm afraid
26 she's my biggest fan. She just doesn't know when to quit.
27 (*Pause*) Well, don't quit now, dear. You might as well tell
28 them about my album.
29 REV. DAVIS: You've made an album? That is impressive.
30 IMA: All great singers make albums. Show him, Sister. (*MRS.*
31 *TISHWATER reaches inside a bag and pulls out a photo*
32 *album.*)
33 IMA: I take pictures at every church where I perform.
34 REV. DAVIS: Oh, I thought you meant —
35 IMA: (*Opens up the album.*) Here I am with Billy Fletcher, the

- 1 famous ventriloquist.
- 2 REV. DAVIS: (*Pointing to the picture*) That must be his dummy.
- 3 IMA: (*Offended but remaining proper*) That's me.
- 4 MRS. TISHWATER: It's quite an honor to have Sister
- 5 performing for our little parish, Rev. Davis.
- 6 REV. DAVIS: I'm sure we'll enjoy —
- 7 IMA: (*Laughing and pointing to a picture in the album.*) Look —
- 8 there I am having dinner with the Pope.
- 9 REV. DAVIS: You know the Pope?
- 10 IMA: Oh yes, Virginia Pope from Rock Bridge, Arizona.
- 11 (*Laughs.*) I fool them every time with that one. I call that
- 12 my Pope joke.
- 13 REV. DAVIS: (*Fake laugh*) Oh yes, you are quite witty.
- 14 MRS. TISHWATER: The Lord has blessed my sister in so
- 15 many ways, and she wants to share that. Sister, don't
- 16 you worry — Rev. Davis here will give you all the time
- 17 you want to sing your uplifting Christmas songs. Isn't
- 18 that right, Reverend?
- 19 REV. DAVIS: (*Hardly sincere*) Oh, goody. (*Wipes his forehead*
- 20 *with his handkerchief.*) So, what beautiful carols will you
- 21 be bringing to our congregation?
- 22 IMA: I'll begin with my wonderful rendition of "Silent Night,"
- 23 followed by "Good King Wenceslas," "God Rest Ye Merry
- 24 Gentlemen," "Let It Snow, Let It Snow," "What Child Is
- 25 This?" "Deck the Halls," and of course I can't let a
- 26 concert go by without performing my very own song,
- 27 "Baby Jesus Is My Friend, Though He Won't Lend Me
- 28 Money."
- 29 MRS. TISHWATER: She wrote that one herself.
- 30 REV. DAVIS: (*Wiping his forehead*) We haven't exactly planned
- 31 on an entire concert, Mrs. Tishwater.
- 32 MRS. TISHWATER: We'll just have to settle on a compromise.
- 33 You allow my sister to sing her heart out Sunday
- 34 morning, and I won't cancel the very large check I just
- 35 wrote to the church's mission fund to Outer Mongolia.

- 1 **REV. DAVIS:** *(With a pinch of sarcasm)* Can I at least lead the
 2 congregation in a word of prayer before the service
 3 begins?
- 4 **MRS. TISHWATER:** We'll see if there's time. Now, before we
 5 part ways, Sister would like to delight you with a tiny
 6 sample of a song she'll be performing.
- 7 **IMA:** I'd be honored. *(She pulls the music from the large purse*
 8 *and opens it. She begins her song. TISHA enters as IMA*
 9 *continues to sing, but lowers the volume so the conversation can*
 10 *be heard.)* Hark! the herald angels sing,
 11 "Glory to the newborn King!
 12 Peace on earth and mercy mild,
 13 God and sinners reconciled"
 14 Joyful, all ye nations rise.
 15 Join the triumph of the skies
 16 With the angelic host proclaim:
 17 "Christ is born in Bethlehem."
 18 Hark! the herald angels sing,
 19 "Glory to the newborn King!"
- 20 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Tisha, dear — there you are. Now, are
 21 you absolutely sure that Margaret and Virgil won't be
 22 around Sunday morning?
- 23 **TISHA:** Mummy, will you trust me for once? I've already told
 24 you I took care of that situation. They have no idea
 25 we're having services this Sunday.
- 26 **MRS. TISHWATER:** If they show up and disrupt Sister's
 27 concert, she may never recover from the shock. She's a
 28 very delicate soul.
- 29 **TISHA:** I must rush. Don't forget that Robert is coming over
 30 for dinner and our gift exchange tonight.
- 31 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Drat it all. *(With much reservation)* All
 32 right — but please remind him not to slouch at the table,
 33 use his napkin consistently, and watch his grammar.
- 34 **TISHA:** Mummy, I'm not dating a chimpanzee.
- 35 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Love *is* blind, isn't it? Very well, go!

1 **TISHA:** *'Bye, Mummy. (She exits as MRS. TISHWATER makes*
2 *her way to her sister, who is just finishing her song. REV.*
3 *DAVIS is trying his best to look interested. She finishes her*
4 *song using made-up sign language. MRS. TISHWATER*
5 *applauds.)*

6 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Bravo! Bravo! Oh, Sister — that was truly
7 inspired. You see, Rev. Davis, the concert will be a
8 tremendous success, and the church will receive so
9 much needed publicity. We haven't had visitors for
10 weeks.

11 **REV. DAVS:** Mrs. Tishwater, I really don't think —

12 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Well, Sister, we must rush off. Still lots of
13 errands to run.

14 **IMA:** It was such a pleasure to sing for you, Reverend Dover.

15 **REV. DAVIS:** *(Shaking her hand)* **Davis.**

16 IMA: *(With a big smile)* Until we meet again this Sabbath
17 morning. *Feliz Navidad!*

18 **MRS. TISHWATER:** *Feliz Navidad!* (The LADIES exit. REV.
19 DAVIS wipes his forehead with one hand and holds up his golf
20 club with the other.)

21 **REV. DAVIS:** Maybe I should take up crochet. (*Blackout*)

24 **Scene 3**

26 *(It's Christmas Sunday morning in the sanctuary of First*
27 *Church. BRITTANI enters and sets the small bouquet of*
28 *poinsettias at the table in front of the pulpit [or somewhere else*
29 *on the stage]. REV. DAVIS enters carrying his Bible.)*

30 **REV. DAVIS:** Thank you, Sunshine. They're beautiful.

31 BRITTANI: (*Covering a yawn*) Dad, why did we have to get to
32 church so early this morning?

33 **REV. DAVIS:** I have a few things I need to take care of before
34 **the services begin.** *(He wipes his brow with his*
35 *handkerchief.)*

1 BRITTANI: Must have something to do with the Tishwaters.
 2 (*He hides the handkerchief quickly.*) Dad, is Mrs.
 3 Tishwater's highfalutin' sister going to sing very long
 4 today?

5 REV. DAVIS: Where did you hear that word — highfalutin'?

6 BRITTANI: I've been around. Is she?

7 REV. DAVIS: Mrs. Tishwater's high-class sister is going to
 8 sing a few songs, yes.

9 BRITTANI: High-class, highfalutin'. Toma(aye)toes, toma(ah)toes.
 10 If I see her being mean to Virgil and Margaret today, I
 11 might just have to say something.

12 REV. DAVIS: I'm sure the Tishwaters will be on their best
 13 behavior, sweetheart.

14 BRITTANI: (*Sighs.*) If you say so. I forgot my Bible in the car.
 15 (*She exits.*)

16 REV. DAVIS: (*Looks to heaven.*) Lord, I really need your
 17 wisdom today. If it wasn't for that money that we need
 18 so badly for our mission fund ... Keep my motives pure
 19 and like-minded with your will. Amen.

20 VIRGIL: (*Off-stage*) Brother Reverend?

21 REV. DAVIS: And Lord — if you'd like to begin your
 22 assistance now, I'd appreciate it. (*Turns.*) In the
 23 sanctuary, Virgil! (*VIRGIL and MARGARET enter wearing*
 24 *plain, worn church clothes.*)

25 VIRGIL: Here he is, Margaret.

26 MARGARET: Mornin', Brother Reverend. I never knew you
 27 got up with the chickens.

28 REV. DAVIS: Yes, well, listen — I guess you were wondering
 29 why I asked you to arrive at the church prematurely.

30 VIRGIL: No sir, but we *were* wondering why you asked us
 31 here so early.

32 REV. DAVIS: I wanted to give you something — a Christmas
 33 gift from me to you. (*He hands them boxes and bags.*) It's
 34 been ten months since you first attended First Church.
 35 Think of it as an anniversary gift.

- 1 VIRGIL: (*Looking into one of the bags*) You bought us some
2 clothes?
- 3 MARGARET: We don't know what to say.
- 4 REV. DAVIS: Don't say anything. Just take them with our
5 congratulations.
- 6 VIRGIL: We surely will, Brother Reverend. Just wait until
7 you see us next Sunday in our brand-new Sunday go-to-
8 meetin' clothes. (*Shouts to Off-stage.*) Elmer, come see
9 what we got!
- 10 REV. DAVIS: Um, Virgil, why wait?
- 11 VIRGIL: What do you mean?
- 12 REV. DAVIS: Why don't you wear your clothes ... I don't
13 know ... today? It would mean so much to me.
- 14 VIRGL: Then of course we'll wear your clothes, if it means
15 makin' you happy.
- 16 REV. DAVIS: Thank you, Virgil. Thanks to both of you, so
17 much. (*ELMER enters wearing overalls.*) And here's a bag
18 for Elmer.
- 19 REV. DAVIS: I'll show you where you can try them on. (*They*
20 *exit, accidentally leaving ELMER behind. Off-stage, IMA*
21 *warms up her voice. When IMA begins her scales, ELMER*
22 *covers his ears. MR. and MRS. TISHWATER enter. She*
23 *carries a large bouquet of poinsettias and he, a bag of popcorn.*
24 *MRS. TISHWATER replaces the flowers BRITTANI brought*
25 *in before and hides the smaller bouquet. MR. TISHWATER*
26 *stands and stares at ELMER, who is still covering his ears and*
27 *staring off into space. IMA stops and ELMER uncovers his*
28 *ears. MRS. TISHWATER crosses to MR. TISHWATER and*
29 *points at ELMER.*)
- 30 MRS. TISHWATER: Frederick, what's that? (*MR. TISHWATER*
31 *shrugs.*) Excuse me, young man — but could we help you
32 with something?
- 33 ELMER: (*With that pondering look*) If animals are our friends,
34 why won't they ever pick us up at the bus station?
- 35 MRS. TISHWATER: He must be the new janitor we voted to

1 hire. (*Back to ELMER*) Please conduct your cleaning
 2 elsewhere, young man; this is a very important day in
 3 the life of our church. (*Shouting to Off-stage*) Sister, oh
 4 Sister! Are you OK in there? Reginald, sit. (*He does as she*
 5 *exits. It's quiet, and then TISHA and ROBERT rush in.*)

6 ROBERT: I said I was sorry!

7 TISHA: Robert VanPelt — you are the meanest person on the
 8 face of the earth.

9 ROBERT: If you'll just let me explain — she was just an old
 10 friend.

11 TISHA: She's an awfully pretty "old" friend. And she's not *old*
 12 at all.

13 ROBERT: I can't help it if she's pretty.

14 TISHA: (*Turning sharply to him*) So you admit she's pretty?
 15 What a terrible thing to say to your future bride.

16 ROBERT: Look, Tisha, it's all a terrible misunderstanding ...
 17 (*Beat*) What do you mean by future bride? We've only
 18 been dating two weeks.

19 TISHA: It's only a matter of time before you ask me to marry
 20 you. Everyone I date ends up asking me at some point.

21 ROBERT: But we —

22 TISHA: I see what you're doing, mister. You're trying to make
 23 me jealous with another woman. Well, two can play at
 24 that game. What if I went up to any old guy and grabbed
 25 him by the arm like this? (*She crosses to ELMER and grabs*
 26 *his arm.*) And put my arm around his shoulder like this?
 27 And gave him a big kiss like this —

28 ELMER: (*Pulling away*) I'm sorry, ma'am, but if you kiss me,
 29 I'm afraid I'll have to drag you to the altar!

30 TISHA: (*To ROBERT*) See? Every man I meet wants to marry
 31 me.

32 ROBERT: Excuse me, mister, but I'm afraid the lady's with
 33 me. What do you have to say for yourself?

34 ELMER: (*With a pondering look*) Watch out when you're gettin'
 35 all you want. Fattened hogs ain't in luck. (*He exits quickly.*)

- 1 **TISHA:** (*Shouting off to him*) Call me!
- 2 **ROBERT:** Look, Tisha — I like you, I really do. I just think
- 3 things are moving a little too fast, don't you?
- 4 **TISHA:** (*Notices that MR. TISHWATER is watching all this as*
- 5 *though he were watching a good movie.*) Father, are you
- 6 listening in on our private conversation?
- 7 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*Shrugs.*) I'm just eating my popcorn.
- 8 **TISHA:** (*To ROBERT*) You sit down on that pew and do not
- 9 move a muscle! Do you understand?
- 10 **ROBERT:** Yes ma'am.
- 11 **TISHA:** Auntie Ima wishes for me to assist her in her warm-
- 12 ups. (*She rushes off.*)
- 13 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*To ROBERT*) If I were you, I'd take this
- 14 perfect opportunity to get the heck outta Dodge.
- 15 **ROBERT:** I know Tisha can be headstrong, but —
- 16 **MR. TISHWATER:** Listen, she's just like her mother, and I've
- 17 been married to Mrs. Tishwater for twenty-five years. It's
- 18 too late for me, but you've got your whole life ahead of
- 19 you. Run, boy, run!
- 20 **ROBERT:** She intrigues me.
- 21 **MR. TISHWATER:** (*Presenting the bag of popcorn*) In that case,
- 22 you might want to get used to eating this. The crunch
- 23 drowns out all the noise.
- 24 **ROBERT:** But I don't like popcorn. (*Off-stage IMA, MRS.*
- 25 *TISHWATER, and TISHA begin singing. After a second, MR.*
- 26 *TISHWATER pushes the bag of popcorn in front of ROBERT,*
- 27 *who takes a handful. They both munch down. REV. DAVIS*
- 28 *enters.*)
- 29 **REV. DAVIS:** Good morning, Mr. Tishwater. (*MR. TISHWATER*
- 30 *stands quickly and hides the popcorn behind his back.*)
- 31 **MR. TISHWATER:** Good morning, Reverend Davis. Beautiful
- 32 day, isn't it? (*Off-stage singing stops.*)
- 33 **REV. DAVIS:** (*Shaking ROBERT's hand as ROBERT stands*) And
- 34 you must be Tisha's fiancé. Congratulations.
- 35 **ROBERT:** I'm actually not her fiancé, sir.

- 1 **MR. TISHWATER:** Don't fight it, son. It's a losing battle. *(To*
2 *REV. DAVIS)* Listen, Reverend, have you heard from
3 Virgil and Margaret this week? I've had this bad feeling
4 my wife and daughter are up to no good.
- 5 **REV. DAVIS:** Yes, I have spoken to Virgil and Margaret, and
6 yes, they *are* here.
- 7 **MR. TISHWATER:** They are? *(Big smile — maybe even a giggle)*
8 Good. *(Eats a bite of popcorn.)*
- 9 **ROBERT:** Virgil and Margaret. Those names sound familiar.
10 For some reason, it reminds me of furnaces.
- 11 **MR. TISHWATER:** If my wife gives those two one minute of
12 trouble today, I will —
- 13 **REV. DAVIS:** Maybe you won't have to do anything, Mr.
14 Tishwater.
- 15 **MR. TISHWATER:** What do you mean?
- 16 **REV. DAVIS:** I have a little plan of my own to protect them
17 from your wife and sister-in-law. *(He turns and shouts to*
18 *Off-stage.)* You may come in now! *(VIRGIL and*
19 *MARGARET enter dressed to the nines. VIRGIL'S hair is*
20 *slicked back and his suit nicely pressed. MARGARET wears a*
21 *nicely fitting dress and well-applied makeup.)* Mr. Tishwater,
22 have you met our visitors?
- 23 **MR. TISHWATER:** I don't believe I have. *(Shakes their hands.)*
24 Hello, and welcome to First Church! I'm Mr. Tishwater,
25 and you are ... ?
- 26 **VIRGIL:** Heck, Mr. Dishwater — don't you even recognize me?
- 27 **MR. TISHWATER:** *(Confused)* The voice sounds familiar.
28 *(MARGARET giggles.)*
- 29 **VIRGIL:** *(Giggling behind his hand)* Mr. Dishwater, it's me.
- 30 **MARGARET:** And me!
- 31 **MR. TISHWATER:** Wait a minute. There are only two people
32 in the world who call me *Dishwater*. But it can't be.
- 33 **REV. DAVIS:** It is. This is Virgil and Margaret.
- 34 **MR. TISHWATER:** *(Walking around them)* What remarkable
35 transformations.

- 1 MARGARET: Brother Reverend — I sure do like these new
 2 clothin' items. I look like one of them there movie stars.
 3 VIRGIL: And I feel like an oil raccoon.
 4 REV. DAVIS You mean oil tycoon, Virgil. Excuse us one
 5 moment. (*He pulls MR. TISHWATER Downstage.*) Do you
 6 think it will work?
 7 MR. TISHWATER: Do I think what will work?
 8 REV. DAVIS: Virgil and Margaret. Do you think your wife
 9 will recognize them? I just want to keep things as
 10 peaceful as possible — for Virgil and Margaret's sake.
 11 MR. TISHWATER: Well, I didn't know who they were until
 12 they spoke.
 13 REV. DAVIS: So if we could only keep them from talking.
 14 MR. TISHWATER: How?
 15 REV. DAVIS: I'm not sure. I'm making this up as I go. (*They*
 16 *keep whispering as ROBERT moves toward VIRGIL.*)
 17 ROBERT: (*Looking over VIRGIL'S suit*) Very nice. (*Feels the lapel*
 18 *of VIRGIL'S jacket.*) Do you know where I could get attire
 19 this nice?
 20 VIRGIL: A tire?
 21 ROBERT: Yes, attire.
 22 VIRGIL: Probably Rosco's Auto Supply out on Highway
 23 Forty. You could get one there.
 24 ROBERT: Get a what?
 25 VIRGIL: A tire.
 26 ROBERT: I don't need a tire.
 27 MARGARET: You just said you did.
 28 ROBERT: No, I said attire. (*VIRGIL stares at ROBERT.*) You
 29 wear attire.
 30 VIRGIL: If you wear a tire where I'm from, they'd throw you
 31 in the loony bin. (*ELMER enters dressed in his fancy suit as*
 32 *REV. DAVIS crosses to VIRGIL.*)
 33 VIRGIL: This is Cousin Elmer — say hey to ever'body, Elmer.
 34 ELMER: (*Quickly*) Hey. (*Drops his head.*)
 35 VIRGIL: Cousin Elmer says hello, ever'body, and sorry he's

- 1 so grumpy, but that his shirt and tie is chokin' the livin'
 2 daylights outta him, but he'll be OK, not to worry none.
 3 **REV. DAVIS:** You got all that from "Hey?"
 4 **VIRGIL:** Cousin Elmer says a lot with his eyes. Ain't that
 5 right, Cousin Elmer?
 6 **ELMER:** *(Eyes wide open)* Reckon so.
 7 **VIRGIL:** He just said we had lots of good times growin' up,
 8 and he remembers one funny incident when we was
 9 squirrel huntin' and a squirrel jumped out of a tree on
 10 top of my Uncle Cletus, and Uncle Cletus screamed like
 11 a banshee and ran through the woods, then fell face first
 12 in a muddy creek.
 13 **MARGARET:** *(Laughing)* Cousin Elmer sure can tell some
 14 good stories.
 15 **ROBERT:** But he didn't tell a —
 16 **REV. DAVIS:** Well, Virgil — what would you all say to a soft
 17 pew?
 18 **VIRGIL:** Depends on what the soft pew said first. *(BRITTANI*
 19 *enters with her Bible.)*
 20 **BRITTANI:** Dad, I'm scared. I heard two cats fighting in the
 21 back alley.
 22 **MR. TISHWATER:** Cats?
 23 **BRITTANI:** Yes sir, it was a terrible screeching sound. *(MRS.*
 24 *TISHWATER, IMA, and TISHA are singing Off-stage.)*
 25 There they go again. *(Covers her ears along with ELMER.)*
 26 **REV. DAVIS:** *(In an attempt to change the subject)* Pumpkin, have
 27 you met our visitors?
 28 **ROBERT:** Hello, my name is Robert.
 29 **REV. DAVIS:** Robert's dating Tisha.
 30 **BRITTANI:** I'm sorry. *(The singing backstage stops.)*
 31 **REV. DAVIS:** *(Nervous laugh)* She didn't mean that.
 32 **VIRGIL:** Mornin', Brittani.
 33 **BRITTANI:** *(Looking around)* That's funny, I thought I heard
 34 Virgil's voice.
 35 **VIRGIL:** *(Waves at her.)* We're right here, see?

- 1 BRITTANI: Is this some kind of trick?
- 2 VIRGIL: (*Waves.*) Nope, it's really us in our new appraisal.
- 3 MARGARET: (*Slaps VIRGIL'S arm.*) Apparel.
- 4 BRITTANI: Why are you dressed that way?
- 5 REV. DAVIS: Don't they look nice, dear?
- 6 BRITTANI: They don't look real. There wasn't anything
- 7 wrong with what they were wearing before.
- 8 REV. DAVIS: We'll talk about it later, pumpkin. Go ahead and
- 9 have a seat while we get ready for the service.
- 10 (*BROTHER WILSON enters followed closely by MRS.*
- 11 *TISHWATER.*)
- 12 MRS. TISHWATER: (*Speaking to BROTHER WILSON*) I'm
- 13 afraid you don't understand, Mr. Wilson — my sister has
- 14 traveled all these miles, and she *will* sing as many songs
- 15 as she wishes.
- 16 BROTHER WILSON: Mrs. Tishwater, I'm trying to be
- 17 understanding, but I'm afraid I must put my foot down.
- 18 The last time I checked, I *was* still the music director.
- 19 MRS. TISHWATER: (*Agitated*) Rev. Davis, are you listening to
- 20 this? A well-respected and renowned singer such as my
- 21 sister being treated like a common small-time soloist.
- 22 BROTHER WILSON: You should have consulted with me
- 23 earlier in the week, Mrs. Tishwater. That's all.
- 24 MRS. TISHWATER: Must I remind you who pays your salary,
- 25 Mr. Wilson?
- 26 REV. DAVIS: Brother Wilson, could I see you for a moment?
- 27 (*He pulls him to the front of the stage as they carry on a*
- 28 *private conversation.*)
- 29 MRS. TISHWATER: Reginald, I do feel a headache coming
- 30 on. Run to the car and bring my nerve pills like a good
- 31 husband, will you?
- 32 MR. TISHWATER: But —
- 33 MRS. TISHWATER: And do it now! Good heavens — it's not
- 34 like I'm asking you to jump off a bridge.
- 35 MR. TISHWATER: Yes, dear. (*He turns to ROBERT.*) I hope

1 **you're taking notes.**

2 **ROBERT:** *(Swallows with a gulp.)* **Yes sir. I think I'll stay close**
 3 **to you.** *(ROBERT and MR. TISHWATER exit. MRS.*
 4 *TISHWATER stands Downstage in front of VIRGIL,*
 5 *MARGARET, and ELMER. MRS. TISHWATER looks*
 6 *through a book of carols.)*

7 **VIRGIL:** **Good mornin', Mrs. Dishwater.** *(MRS. TISHWATER'S*
 8 *eyes grow wide. She slowly looks around. She sees VIRGIL,*
 9 *MARGARET, and ELMER. VIRGIL and MARGARET wave.*
 10 *MRS. TISHWATER turns back and faces the audience. She*
 11 *shakes this off and goes back to her book.)*

12 **MARGARET:** **Merry Christmas to you and yours?** *(MRS.*
 13 *TISHWATER stops again and turns but sees no one she*
 14 *recognizes. She shouts to Off-stage.)* **Hurry with those nerve**
 15 **pills, Reginald; I'm beginning to imagine dreadful things.**
 16 *(TISHA enters with IMA and they cross to the pulpit.)*

17 **TISHA:** **Here we are, Auntie Ford.**

18 **IMA:** **Handkerchief, dear.**

19 **TISHA:** **Oh.** *(TISHA pulls out a handkerchief and lays it flat on*
 20 *the chair. IMA takes a seat. She and TISHA go over music*
 21 *silently as BROTHER WILSON and REV. DAVIS [who have*
 22 *been pantomiming a conversation previously] speak out loud.)*

23 **BROTHER WILSON:** **I should have been consulted in the**
 24 **change-of-service plans, that's all.**

25 **REV. DAVIS:** **I'm afraid that's my fault.** *(Wipes his forehead.)*
 26 **Mrs. Tishwater gets me so rattled, I lose any focus I have**
 27 **left.**

28 **BROTHER WILSON:** **I prepared a beautiful rendition of**
 29 **"Away in a Manger" that I was really looking forward**
 30 **to singing.**

31 **REV. DAVIS:** **As a favor to me, could you please alter those**
 32 **plans a bit? It would mean a great deal.** *(They continue to*
 33 *pantomime their conversation as MARGARET, VIRGIL, and*
 34 *ELMER chat.)*

35 **VIRGIL:** **Elmer, what do you think about our church house?**

- 1 **ELMER:** *(With a profound look)* All the buzzards will come to
 2 the mule's funeral.
- 3 **MARGARET:** I wonder what that means.
- 4 **VIRGIL:** I ain't sure, but it sure sounded deep.
- 5 **ELMER:** *(He has been looking over at TISHA.)* Who's that over
 6 there?
- 7 **VIRGIL:** That's Tisher Tishwater; she's a fancy high-society
 8 gal.
- 9 **ELMER:** She's prettier than a new set of snow tires.
- 10 **VIRGIL:** Cousin Elmer, cast your wayward eyes down to the
 11 floor and behave yourself. *(He pushes ELMER'S head*
 12 *down, but it pops back up. He pushes it again, but it pops up.)*
- 13 **MARGARET:** You might as well give up, Virgil — the country
 14 rat's already spotted a hunk of citified cheese.
- 15 **ELMER:** You think it would be OK if I talk to her, Cousin
 16 Virgil?
- 17 **VIRGIL:** No! Now you sit right there in that very spot, and
 18 don't you move a muscle.
- 19 **MARGARET:** *(Pushing his head down)* Besides, Tisher only
 20 talks to suffocated boys who dress nice.
- 21 **ELMER:** I'm dressed nice.
- 22 **MARGARET:** But you ain't suffocated.
- 23 **ELMER:** What's suffocated mean?
- 24 **VIRGIL:** It means swave. And swave is somethin' you ain't.
- 25 **MARGARET:** Don't you know that as soon as you say
 26 somethin' to her, you'll blow your whole swave disguise?
 27 *(Back to REVEREND DAVIS and BROTHER WILSON)*
- 28 **REV. DAVIS:** I really appreciate this, Brother Wilson. *(MR.*
 29 *TISHWATER and ROBERT re-enter and make a beeline to*
 30 *MRS. TISHWATER.)*
- 31 **MR. TISHWATER:** *(Gives MRS. TISHWATER her pills.)* Here we
 32 go, dear. Here are your nerve pills.
- 33 **ROBERT:** *(Hands MRS. TISHWATER a glass.)* And here's some
 34 water.
- 35 **MRS. TISHWATER:** Good heavens, do you want the whole

- 1 world to know I take these things? I shall return.
 2 (*Turning sharply*) And make sure my sister gets anything
 3 she needs. (*She exits.*)
- 4 VIRGIL: (*Approaching*) Is anything wrong with Mrs.
 5 Dishwater?
- 6 MR. TISHWATER: Just the usual, Virgil — just the usual.
- 7 ROBERT: (*Taking notes*) Keep nerve pills handy at all times.
- 8 MARGARET: Mr. Dishwater, if your wife's sick, maybe she
 9 should put her head between her knees.
- 10 MR. TISHWATER: I don't think —
- 11 VIRGIL: Margaret, don't be silly. She could never bend over
 12 that far.
- 13 REV. DAVIS: Mr. Tishwater, would you mind keeping an eye
 14 on Virgil while Brother Wilson and I go to the back and
 15 rework the order of service? (*BROTHER WILSON and*
 16 *REV. DAVIS exit.*)
- 17 MR. TISHWATER: But ... I sure could use some popcorn
 18 right about now. (*He sits away from everyone else.*)
- 19 ROBERT: (*Sits as he writes.*) Stock up on gallons of popcorn.
- 20 TISHA: Could I get you anything, Auntie?
- 21 IMA: I could use a nice bottle of chilled water, dear.
- 22 TISHA: Right away, Auntie. (*She starts to cross in front of*
 23 *ELMER, but he stands directly in front of her. TISHA tries*
 24 *going around him, but he steps in front of her, cutting her off.*
 25 *MARGARET and VIRGIL are in a deep conversation and*
 26 *don't see this.*) Excuse me. (*ELMER just stands there.*) I'll
 27 just be going now. (*ELMER stands there.*)
- 28 ROBERT: (*Approaching*) Is this gentleman giving you any
 29 trouble, Tisha?
- 30 TISHA: Huh? Oh — nothing you should concern yourself
 31 over. (*Flirty to ELMER*) Oh, the things you say to make
 32 me blush!
- 33 ROBERT: What's he saying to make you blush? (*To ELMER*)
 34 What are you saying to make my girl blush?
- 35 ELMER: (*Pondering look*) Even an old heifer has sense enough

- 1 to come in out of the rain.
- 2 **TISHA:** *(Fake laughter)* Oh, you — how witty you are!
- 3 **VIRGIL:** Elmer, what have we told you? *(TISHA looks*
4 *confused.)*
- 5 **TISHA:** *(To VIRGIL)* I'm sorry, but do I know you?
- 6 **MARGARET:** Why, of course you do, Tisher. It's Virgil and
7 Margaret. We're all dressed up fancy-like.
- 8 **MR. TISHWATER:** Uh-oh. *(Covers his face with his hands.)*
- 9 **TISHA:** It can't be; you're not supposed to be here. I told you
10 myself that services were ... I mean ...
- 11 **VIRGIL:** It turned out the furnace wasn't broke after all.
12 Wasn't it lucky I found out before it was too late?
- 13 **TISHA:** *(Hands to her chest)* Oh, my.
- 14 **ROBERT:** *(Turning to MR. TISHWATER)* What do I do?
- 15 **MR. TISHWATER:** *(Handing him a bill)* Here's a fifty. Lead her
16 that way while she catches her breath. *(Points to the door.)*
- 17 **ROBERT:** *(Turns to TISHA, holding the bill out to her.)* Look
18 what I got, Tisha. Let's walk outside for a little fresh air.
- 19 **TISHA:** But we weren't supposed to have to worry about
20 them showing up. *(She sees the money, holds her hands out,*
21 *and follows ROBERT out.)* Money? Is that money? Pretty
22 money.
- 23 **ELMER:** Wait! I got lots more ponderin's! *(Shouting)* Stump
24 water won't cure the gripes! It don't rain ever' time the
25 pig squeals! *(But they're gone.)*
- 26 **VIRGIL:** Cousin Elmer, would you take a seat and quit
27 embarrassin' yourself? I keep tellin' you, we ain't back
28 home. They act more suffocated here in the city.
- 29 **MARGARET:** *(Tapping VIRGIL on the shoulder and pointing to*
30 *IMA)* Virgil, look over there — it looks like we have a
31 visitor. Let's go greet her and make her feel welcome.
32 *(They cross to IMA.)*
- 33 **MR. TISHWATER:** Virgil, wait!
- 34 **VIRGIL:** Yes sir?
- 35 **MR. TISHWATER:** *(Smiles.)* Never mind. *(Sits back.)*

- 1 VIRGIL: *(To IMA)* Hey there, lady, we just wanted to welcome
 2 you to our Christmas service.
- 3 MARGARET: It's mighty nice havin' you here.
- 4 IMA: *(Without taking her eyes off the music)* I'm sure it is.
- 5 VIRGIL: I'm Virgil, and this here is Margaret. What's your
 6 name?
- 7 IMA: You mean you don't know? Ima Ford.
- 8 VIRGIL: *(Taken aback)* You're a what?
- 9 IMA: Ima Ford. *(VIRGIL and MARGARET look at each other,*
 10 *confused.)*
- 11 MARGARET: *(Attempting to remain polite)* Well, ain't that nice?
 12 You're a Ford.
- 13 VIRGIL: *(Making a joke)* It's nice to meet you. I'm a Chevrolet,
 14 and my wife here's a Toyota. *(MARGARET slaps VIRGIL'S*
 15 *arm.)*
- 16 MARGARET: So, uh, Mrs. Ford, are you from around here?
- 17 IMA: *(Short)* No, no! I flew in yesterday.
- 18 VIRGIL: You flew all by yourself?
- 19 IMA: Of course not — I rode in on the wings of an Eagle.
- 20 VIRGIL: *(Smiling as best he can)* Did you hear that, Margaret?
 21 She rode in on the wings of an eagle. Ain't that nice? On
 22 the wings of an eagle.
- 23 MARGARET: *(Pulling VIRGIL away from IMA)* Poor, poor
 24 thing, she must have a few seeds loose in her gourd. She
 25 thinks she's an auto-mo-bill ...
- 26 VIRGIL: Yeah, that rides on eagle wings. Margaret, 'member
 27 how ever'body welcomed us into the flock when we first
 28 started comin' here at Easter time? It's our duty to do
 29 the same for this here crazy woman.
- 30 MARGARET: *(Slaps his arm.)* Don't call her crazy — that's
 31 such an ugly word. I wonder what we should say to the
 32 loony bird.
- 33 VIRGIL: We've got to make her feel at ease. Just follow my
 34 lead, Margaret. *(Crosses back to IMA.)* Now you said you
 35 are ...

- 1 IMA: (*Impatient that she keeps getting interrupted*) Ima Ford.
- 2 VIRGIL: That's a mite interestin'. Ain't that interestin',
3 Margaret? (*MR. TISWATER is laughing as he watches the*
4 *action.*)
- 5 MARGARET: It sure is — you're a Ford. That sure is
6 interestin'.
- 7 IMA: Are you familiar with the Fords?
- 8 VIRGIL: Yes ma'am. I used to drive a Ford around years ago.
- 9 IMA: So you must chauffeur?
- 10 VIRGIL: No ma'am. I don't show fur, but I have an uncle
11 who does. He's a trapper.
- 12 MARGARET: He shows rabbit fur, squirrel fur, skunk fur —
- 13 IMA: Chauffeur means you drive people places.
- 14 VIRGIL: No ma'am, my uncle usually went trappin' by
15 himself.
- 16 IMA: I'm confused.
- 17 VIRGIL: You're tellin' us. (*MARGARET slaps his arm.*)
- 18 IMA: I'm really sorry, but I'll have to sign autographs later.
19 I must do my warm-ups.
- 20 MARGARET: (*Pulling VIRGIL Downstage*) Virgil, it's worse
21 than we thought.
- 22 VIRGIL: You're right, Margaret. All of Mrs. Ford's plugs ain't
23 firin'.
- 24 MARGARET: Can you imagine how Mrs. Dishwater is goin'
25 to treat her when she finds out?
- 26 VIRGIL: She'll treat her just like she treated us on our first
27 day — like ground floor tenants in a two-story outhouse.
- 28 IMA: (*Warming up*) La la la la la laaa. Lu lu lu lu lu lu.
29 Lo lo lo lo lo lo lo.
- 30 ELMER: Virgil, that hurts my ears.
- 31 VIRGIL: Shhh, quiet, Cousin Elmer. Pretend it's the prettiest
32 sound you ever heard.
- 33 ELMER: My imagination ain't that big.
- 34 MARGARET: Virgil, that's the worst singin' I ever heard.
35 (*MRS. TISHWATER enters.*)

- 1 VIRGIL: Oh no, there's Ms. Dishwater. What do we do?
- 2 MARGARET: It's too late, Virgil.
- 3 MRS. TISHWATER: *(To IMA)* Oh, dear — that was exquisite,
4 superlative! You know what you are? You are a virtuoso!
5 A prodigy!
- 6 MARGARET: That is so mean!
- 7 VIRGIL: Mrs. Dishwater, I can't believe you could be so
8 hateful here at Christmas time!
- 9 MRS. TISHWATER: I beg your pardon?
- 10 VIRGIL: It's too late to beg! Ms. Ford, don't you listen to a
11 word she says. You ain't none of them things she just
12 called you! *(Church members are starting to enter the*
13 *sanctuary and have a seat.)*
- 14 IMA: I'm not?
- 15 VIRGIL: No, you ain't! Mrs. Dishwater don't have no idea
16 what she's talking about.
- 17 MRS. TISHWATER: Why does your voice sound so familiar?
- 18 MARGARET: *(Disguising her voice)* Uh, come on over here,
19 dear, and let's have a seat.
- 20 VIRGIL: I'm sorry, Margaret, but I'm already riled. Ms.
21 Dishwater, how can you treat somebody so mean? Can't
22 you see she's already crazy without you makin' it worse?
- 23 MRS. TISHWATER: *(Eyes grow wide)* Margaret? Dishwater?
24 Only two people call me ... Please don't tell me. *(Almost*
25 *afraid to say the word)* Virgil?
- 26 VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, it's me, and I must say I am ashamed of
27 you.
- 28 MARGARET: *(Shame fingers)* Shame, shame, shame.
- 29 MRS. TISHWATER: But you're not supposed to be here ... it
30 was a plan that couldn't fail.
- 31 IMA: Sister, would you please tell me what's going on here?
- 32 MRS. TISHWATER: Nothing, dear. *(Fake smile)* What makes
33 you think something's going on?
- 34 VIRGIL: *(To IMA)* No matter what Ms. Dishwater says to you,
35 Ms Ford, you just go right ahead and sing your little

- 1 crazy heart out.
- 2 **MRS. TISHWATER:** (*Rushes over to her husband.*) Reginald, oh
- 3 Reginald. It's just terrible. What am I going to do?
- 4 They're here. They're both here. And they're talking to
- 5 my sister! Come with me — I must find Reverend Davis
- 6 at once. (*She pulls him off.*) Reverend! Reverend!
- 7 **MARGARET:** How are you feelin', Ms. Ford?
- 8 **IMA:** Hassled, anxious, under duress.
- 9 **VIRGIL:** (*Excited*) Glad to know you're feelin' better.
- 10 **IMA:** (*Irritated*) Would you allow me to continue, please?
- 11 **VIRGIL:** You go right ahead, Ms. Pontiac.
- 12 **MARGARET:** (*Hits his arm.*) Ford!
- 13 **VIRGIL:** (*Crossing back to his seat*) We'll just sit over here out
- 14 of your way.
- 15 **IMA:** Thank you ever so much. (*She clears her throat and sings*
- 16 *a verse of a carol.*) Good King Wenceslas looked out on the
- 17 Feast of Stephen ...
- 18 **ELMER:** I know this song.
- 19 **IMA:** (*Singing*) As the snow lay round about, deep and crisp
- 20 and even.
- 21 **ELMER:** (*Joining her*) Brightly shone the moon that night ...
- 22 **VIRGIL and MARGARET:** (*Joining IMA and ELMER*) Though
- 23 the frost was cruel ...
- 24 **IMA:** (*Stops singing, hands on hips.*) See here, you three. I am
- 25 aghast!
- 26 **VIRGIL:** First she's a Ford, now she's a gast.
- 27 **IMA:** Do you often practice such imposition?
- 28 **VIRGIL:** No ma'am, we never practiced even one time. How
- 29 did we sound?
- 30 **IMA:** Your pitch was off, your timing was vacillating, and
- 31 your tone was atrociously nauseating.
- 32 **VIRGIL:** (*Excited*) What do you know about that? Our talents
- 33 must be natural!
- 34 **MARGARET:** Look, Ms. Honda —
- 35 **VIRGIL:** Ford!

- 1 MARGARET: Can't you see how you just bring the best out
2 in people? That takes *true* talent.
- 3 IMA: *True* talent? You know me pretty well after all.
- 4 VIRGIL: Sure! Elmer here ain't sung in years. But once you
5 started beltin' it out, why, he automatically started right
6 in.
- 7 IMA: Perhaps you have a point. My gift *is* quite contagious,
8 isn't it? Still — it isn't polite to interrupt a virtuoso.
- 9 MARGARET: (*Secretly to VIRGIL*) That must be a foreign
10 make.
- 11 IMA: My concert should remain methodic and ordered. Now,
12 please take your seat.
- 13 ELMER: But I wanted to sing some more. That was fun.
14 (*MRS. TISHWATER rushes in, followed closely by REV.*
15 *DAVIS, MR. TISHWATER, TISHA, and ROBERT.*)
- 16 REV. DAVIS: Mrs. Tishwater, please.
- 17 MRS. TISHWATER: And who do you think you are fooling
18 with this charade?
- 19 REV. DAVIS: I was just trying to protect —
- 20 MRS. TISHWATER: Reginald, would you please remove our
21 guest soloist to the church's foyer while we work this
22 out?
- 23 REV. DAVIS: But Mrs. Tishwater —
- 24 MRS. TISHWATER: And do it now! (*Places her arm around*
25 *IMA.*) Dear, you will warm up in the vestibule. The
26 acoustics are better.
- 27 MR. TISHWATER: (*Pulling REV. DAVIS Downstage*) If we can
28 just pacify my wife until the nerve pill sets in. (*To IMA*)
29 Right this way. (*MR. TISHWATER and IMA exit Stage*
30 *Left.*)
- 31 VIRGIL: Wait a minute, where is he takin' her?
- 32 MRS. TISHWATER: To the vestibule, vestibule, vestibule!
- 33 MARGARET: (*Upset*) Virgil, they're takin' her to the vestibule,
34 vestibule, vestibule! (*Beat*) What's a vestibule?
- 35 VIRGIL: Some type of dungeon, I wager.



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