

STONE SOUP

By Kristian Kissel

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SYNOPSIS: A giant carrot grows smack-dab in the center of four different property lines, the result of teamwork (and some scientific achievements) between four families. Unfortunately, that teamwork has long been forgotten, and a feud has erupted over which family actually owns the carrot. The General claims it's hers, since her son provided the seed. The Fargins claim it was their growth formula, the Ornerys say their soil helped it grow so large, and the Corneliuses say that without their specially mineralized water, it would never be what it is today. Luckily, three mysterious strangers arrive just in time to help the families see the error of their ways and remind them what teamwork is what it's all about. A comedic and character-driven twist on a classic story.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 5 males, 7 either)

WALLY FURGIN (m).....	The nerdy scientist type. <i>(56 lines)</i>
BILLY FURGIN (m)	Wally's son. Not quite as nerdy as his dad. <i>(55 lines)</i>
ROBOT (f/m).....	The Fargin's invention. Moves and talks like a stereotypical robot. <i>(13 lines)</i>
JUNIOR ORNERY (f/m).....	Child of Ellie and Thaddeus. Southern accent. <i>(28 lines)</i>
JUNIOR 2 ORNERY (f/m).....	Child of Ellie and Thaddeus. Southern accent. <i>(27 lines)</i>
ELLIE ORNERY (f)	Wife of Thaddeus. Your typical tough Southern mother. <i>(33 lines)</i>
THADDEUS ORNERY (m).....	Ellie's husband and the juniors' dad. <i>(46 lines)</i>
GENERAL GENERAL (f)	Stiff military type. <i>(39 lines)</i>

- CONRAD GENERAL (m) General's son. Intentionally refers to his mother as "sir." Upper teens or college-aged. (29 lines)
- CRAIG CROMWELL (m)..... Wealthy heir of his grandfather's fortune. (40 lines)
- JEAN CROMWELL (f)..... Craig's wife. (24 lines)
- BELINDA CROMWELL (f) Craig and Jean's daughter. Home from college. (29 lines)
- FRANCIS (f/m) The Cromwell's butler (or maid). (13 lines)
- ONE (f/m)..... Mysterious visitor. Silent, but the most "magical" of the three. (1 line)
- TWO (f/m)..... Mysterious visitor. The spiritual member of the group. (23 lines)
- THREE (f/m) Mysterious visitor. The straightforward, construction worker-type. (30 lines)

DURATION: 40 minutes

COSTUMES

General and Conrad wear military outfits.

Robot should wear something silvery/metallic.

The Ornerys can wear overalls, cut-off jeans and t-shirts, or something similar.

Wally should look like your fairly stereotypical "crazy" scientist (think Doc Brown).

Butler or maid outfit for Francis.

The Cromwells should look very chic. Nice dresses, suit and tie, etc.

As far as the visitors go, they can really look like whatever you'd like. In the original production, we had One in a chef's uniform, Two in a flowing dress with lots of fake jewelry, and Three in a hard hat and tool belt.

MUSIC/SOUND EFFECTS

Cheesy love song

Magical sound effect

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Stone Soup had its world premiere at Live Theatre Workshop on July 22, 2016.

PROPS LIST

- Large camouflage net (or some type of cover)
- Remote control
- Phone (or camera)
- Slingshot
- Two (2) fake birds
- Rule book
- Three (3) glasses of sparkling cider
- Binoculars
- Notebook
- Tape measure
- Pot (with hole in bottom)
- Box (with hole in top, for pot to go on)
- Magic trick – long handkerchief
- Glass of water (pulled out of pot)
- Magic trick – flowers pulled out of sleeve
- Various kitchen utensils (pulled out of pot)
- Apron (for Robot)
- Rock
- Bag of lentils
- Letter in an envelope
- Chopped onions
- Container of vegetable broth
- Chopped celery
- Chopped tomatoes

SETTING: *The stage floor has a large “+” on it, essentially dividing the stage into four areas. At first, each family should (to the extent possible) try to stay in their assigned quarter of the stage. Smack in the center of the “+” is the top of a very large carrot. Somewhere offstage is a large camouflage net (or any covering). GENERAL and CONRAD are beneath it.*

AT RISE: *After a beat, WALLY FURGIN and BILLY enter. BILLY carries a remote control, like the kind that would drive an RC car. They look around to see if anyone is there. When they are satisfied they are alone.*

WALLY: All right son, this is it! Bring it out!

BILLY: Sure thing Pops!

Both stand aside as BILLY begins to manipulate the controls on the remote. A ROBOT appears from upstage left and crosses center stage, over carrot. The ROBOT moves and talks stiffly – like a stereotypical robot.

WALLY: That's it, son... Not too fast now... Watch its arms... Ease it just over the center... Perfect!

ROBOT: Arrived at destination.

BILLY: All right Robot—

WALLY: We really need to give it a better name.

BILLY: Time to do your thing! *(He pushes buttons.)*

ROBOT: Prepare to extract. *(Bends over, grabs some of the leafy part.)*

WALLY: Wait!

ROBOT freezes.

WALLY: Son, do you realize what a big moment this is for us? The whole world is about to marvel at OUR invention! Just wait until they see this carrot and finally witness what our Super Special Vegetable Growth Stuff can do!

BILLY: You know, if there's anything that needs a new name—

WALLY: We are about to make the cover of Chemistry Journal! My dream! Wally and Billy Fargin are about to become the hottest names in the scientific community! And it won't stop there! The Guinness Book of Records! Farmers Weekly! Teen Scene!

BILLY: Well, I don't think Teen Scene will really care—

WALLY: They'll all be clamoring for an interview with US! We'll be known as the most gifted father-son team since the Wright Brothers!

BILLY: I don't think they were—

WALLY: *(Looking him directly in the face.)* Son, I just want to take this moment to tell you what this means to me. Just know that someday, when the bright lights of fame are twinkling in your eyes, and we get caught up in the emotions that accompany celebrity fortune, and you find that special someone, that good looking blonde from the entertainment world who I don't approve of, which causes a rift between us and results in us going our separate ways for years until you eventually go through a nasty tabloid break-up that leaves you both emotionally and financially broke and you realize that I was right and you come back to pick up the pieces... just know, through it all, that at this moment, I couldn't be prouder to call you my son. *(He hugs him.)*

BILLY: Wow. You've given that a lot of thought. Look, I'm proud of you too Dad. I don't really know about all the other stuff, though.

WALLY: *(Releasing his hug. Wiping tears from his eyes.)* All right son. Time to see what this baby can do!

BILLY: Sounds good! One, two—*(Just as BILLY is about to push a button.)*

WALLY: —oh, wait! I almost forgot! We need a picture of the "magic moment!" Get over there, son! *(Takes his phone out.)*

BILLY: Oh. OK, sure.

BILLY moves to stand next to ROBOT, who is still bent over, its rear facing WALLY. BILLY poses.

WALLY: That's great son, but don't you want to – you know... *(He makes a "turn around" motion with his hand, indicating ROBOT.)*

BILLY: Oh, right. *(He pushes some buttons.)*

ROBOT: Releasing target. *(Lets go, stands up and turns around.)*

BILLY: *(Still pushing buttons.)* And, picture pose...

ROBOT puts its arm up and around BILLY, squeezing him to it.

BILLY: Ah! Too tight, too tight!

WALLY runs to him and grabs the remote. He pushes some buttons and ROBOT releases his grip a bit.

BILLY: Much better. Thanks Dad.

WALLY: One final touch.

He plays with the remote and ROBOT puts its arm in the air, hand in a fist. It then springs its thumb up.

WALLY: Looking good son! Everybody say cheese!

BILLY and ROBOT: Cheese!

WALLY: *(Snapping a picture.)* Fantastic! That is refrigerator-worthy for sure! OK, let's get on with it.

BILLY steps out of ROBOT'S grip and goes back to his dad, taking the remote and moving ROBOT back into place, bent over the carrot and grabbing the leaves.

BILLY: All right, and here we—

WALLY: You know son, if your mother were here today, she would be just as proud as I am. Maybe more.

BILLY: Thanks, Dad.

WALLY: Go ahead.

BILLY: All right. One. Two. Th—

WALLY: You know it was your mother who originally—

ROBOT: For Pete's sake can we get on with it already!

WALLY: Sorry! Yes, of course. What am I thinking? We need to do this before someone sees us! Son, go for it. I'll just stand here silently. You know, not getting in the way or saying anything.

BILLY: Thanks.

WALLY: No problem.

BILLY: OK. One, two, th—

JUNIOR: *(Off stage.)* Not so fast!

JUNIOR and JUNIOR 2 enter. JUNIOR 2 has a slingshot aimed directly at BILLY and WALLY. ROBOT stands up and throws its arms in the air.

ROBOT: I give up!

JUNIOR: I don't know what exactly y'all varmints think yer doin'.

JUNIOR 2: Sure don't look good.

JUNIOR: But y'all best git yer hands off our root vegetable.

JUNIOR 2: Yeah! Find yer own source of beta carotene! This here is our'n!

BILLY: Well, technically, OUR hands were not on it.

WALLY: That's correct. And, while I respect anyone's claim to property, I do believe that the idea that this is yours is highly debatable.

JUNIOR: You can take that up with our Pa!

JUNIOR 2: 'Til then, skee-daddle! 'Less you wanna git plunked!

BILLY: OK, let's deal with this another time, huh Dad?

WALLY: Now look here, Junior...s, this is a very big moment for my son and me. We've worked extremely hard to get here.

BILLY: Dad, let's just go inside, OK?

WALLY: And we really don't want to have to do anything that we would regret.

JUNIOR: What the devil are you talkin' 'bout?

JUNIOR 2: Yeah, git to the point!

WALLY: Well, I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid that we have you outgunned. Billy?

BILLY rolls his eyes and reluctantly pushes some buttons on the remote. ROBOT turns toward the JUNIORS and points its fingers toward them.

WALLY: You see, Robot here is armed—

JUNIOR: Robot?

JUNIOR 2: Is that the best name y'all could drum up?

WALLY: We can set Robot's attack system to anything from "stun" to "annihilate," so I suggest that you—

JUNIOR: Are you tryin' to say that Junior 2 can't beat this here ol' rust bucket?

ROBOT: Hey! Let's watch it with the name-calling!

WALLY: Now, look, you may be a really good shot, but I'm afraid that with your rudimentary, homemade device you'd be lucky to even—

JUNIOR: Show 'em J.T.!

Without taking eyes off of WALLY, JUNIOR 2 points the slingshot straight up and shoots. (NOTE: Nothing is in the slingshot, it's just mimed.) There is a long pause. BILLY looks up. Nothing happens.

BILLY: Dad, what's going on?

WALLY: Not sure, son. *(Back to the JUNIORS.)* Now see here. I'm not sure what exactly you're trying to pull, but as I was saying—

Suddenly, a bird (preferably a rubber chicken) falls from the sky.

WALLY: Well, that is certainly impressive. Nice shot. Still, you've used up all your ammunition, so how do you possibly expect to—

A second bird falls and lands on stage.

JUNIOR: *(Picking up the birds.)* Two birds, one stone.

JUNIOR 2: Ma ain't had to buy meat in a loong time.

WALLY: Point made. Still, I believe that Robot here—

ROBOT: *(Turns.)* Leave me out of it. I never signed up for this! *(Exits.)*

BILLY: I didn't see that coming. *(He follows ROBOT off.)*

WALLY: I told you we made it too independent! Look, why don't you just have your father come and see me, OK? We can sit down, have a drink, and discuss this like adults.

JUNIOR: Fine.

JUNIOR 2: Fine.

WALLY: Good. Just have him stop by when he's ready.

JUNIOR: Fine.

JUNIOR 2: Fine.

WALLY: OK. I'll just... bye. *(He exits. Pause.)*

JUNIOR: That feller sure is odd.

JUNIOR 2: That there is an understatement.

ELLIE: *(From offstage.)* Juniors! Supper's on! Where in tarnation did ya get to?

JUNIOR: Over here, Ma. By the carrot.

ELLIE: (*Entering.*) I have been lookin' all over creation for the two of you! What on Earth are you doin' over here? You haven't seen any critters tryin' to get to it, have ya?

JUNIOR: Sorta.

ELLIE: What? We gotta tell yer Pa! He just treated the soil yesterday!

JUNIOR 2: Not that kind, Ma. Two-legged critters!

ELLIE: Ah! The Fargins at it again?

JUNIOR: Yup.

ELLIE: They still got that robot?

JUNIOR 2: Yeah.

ELLIE: They ain't given it a better name yet?

JUNIOR: Nope.

ELLIE: That's a shame. Well, ya'll c'mon. Supper's gettin' cold. I cooked up that fish that J.T. got last week, and it... (*She starts looking around distractedly.*) is... gonna... be... delicious...

JUNIOR: Um, Ma?

JUNIOR 2: Somethin' wrong?

JUNIOR: You're all spacey.

JUNIOR 2: Yeah. What's goin' on?

ELLIE: Shh! (*Pause.*) You hear that?

JUNIOR and JUNIOR 2: (*Pause.*) No.

ELLIE: Exactly! Juniors, it don't sound like there's anyone within a hundred yards of this here place.

JUNIOR: It is kinda peaceful.

ELLIE: Y'all thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?

JUNIOR 2: Yup. That Duck Dynasty [Or any other popular show.] marathon is gonna be awesome!

ELLIE: Yes. Yes, it is J.T. But that ain't what's on my mind. I'm thinkin' we ought'a start diggin'.

JUNIOR: Oh yeah. (*Pause.*) Fer what?

ELLIE: The carrot, Junior.

JUNIOR: Oh! Ya mean you wanna—?

JUNIOR 2: Yer gonna make the Fargins awful mad.

JUNIOR: And the Generals.

JUNIOR 2: And the Cromwells.

ELLIE: Children! If we can get that carrot, then yer Pa can take it to the store and everyone can see how amazin' Thaddeus Orner's

Organic Soil is. And then maybe they'll start to sell it at them stores, and yer Pa can start makin' some real money, and the Ornerys can finally move to Beverly Hills, where we belong!

JUNIOR: I don't know Ma...

ELLIE: We'll have to deal with everyone else later, Junior. This... this is fer yer Daddy.

JUNIOR: Fer Pa!

JUNIOR 2: Fer Pa!

ELLIE: Start diggin'!

They move toward the carrot. Before they even get a step or two, GENERAL GENERAL and her son, CONRAD, step out from under the netting and onto the stage. They are both dressed in military clothing.

GENERAL: STOP digging!

ELLIE: Diggin' what?

JUNIOR: We ain't diggin' nothin'!

JUNIOR 2: Yeah, not even the carrot.

JUNIOR nudges JUNIOR 2.

JUNIOR 2: What?

GENERAL: Nice try Mrs. Ornery, but we heard the whole thing. Conrad?

CONRAD: We have a violation of neighborhood code 42 dash 5, section 2. Conspiracy to remove vegetational property from an area or land not belonging to the perpetrator.

ELLIE: Now, now, we ain't perpetrated nothin'. And besides, this here carrot is clearly on property that *does* belong to us!

GENERAL: Mrs. Ornery, I believe if you take another look, you will see that the carrot is clearly on the property belonging to me!

ELLIE: Now, General—

GENERAL: I will also remind you that it was Conrad here who provided the seed.

ELLIE: We all know—

GENERAL: Right Conrad?

CONRAD: Yes, sir! I acquired the seed exactly 47 days ago at oh-nine-fifteen hours from the hippie-ish librarian at school whom you don't exactly care for, sir!

GENERAL: Right! All of it! I'm not sure exactly what that guy puts in those seeds to make them grow so big, and I don't want to. Don't ask, don't tell, understand?

CONRAD, JUNIORS and ELLIE: Understood.

GENERAL: What I *do* know is that 47 days after Conrad here acquired this seed, we have one behemoth parsnip!

ELLIE: It's a carrot.

GENERAL: Semantics...

ELLIE: No, actually they're different—

GENERAL: Do not interrupt me, ma'am!

ELLIE: I didn't.

GENERAL: Semantics...

ELLIE: That's not what that means.

GENERAL: In any case, possession is how much of the law? Conrad?

CONRAD: Nine-tenths, sir.

GENERAL: Nine-tenths, Mrs. Ormery. And that is a law that isn't even in the neighborhood code.

CONRAD: Actually, it is, sir.

GENERAL: Not now, Conrad.

CONRAD: Sorry, sir.

GENERAL: That is a law, ma'am, that dates back to the 16th century.

So, given that the seed was *clearly* in our possession—

ELLIE: But, the *carrot* was not!

GENERAL looks over at CONRAD, who frantically flips through a book he's holding. CONRAD looks up.

CONRAD: She's got us there, sir.

GENERAL: Hmm! (*Softly, to Conrad.*) At the next neighborhood meeting, remind me to propose an amendment: whatever a seed becomes is still the property of whoever owned the seed, no matter where it is planted. Got that?

CONRAD: Noted, sir.

GENERAL: All right, Mrs. Ornery. You win this round. But I warn you, do not try to pull that vegetable from the ground!

ELLIE: Well, we was just gonna have supper anyway. Right, Juniors?

JUNIOR: Yup.

JUNIOR 2: Yup.

ELLIE: Fish. No carrots involved. J, JT, let's go.

GENERAL: Very well. Just the same, I will leave Conrad here to guard the vegetable in question.

CONRAD: Um, I have homework, sir.

GENERAL: Later, Conrad. (*Quietly, to ELLIE.*) I don't understand that new math anyway.

ELLIE: Me neither. C'mon, Juniors. (*They exit.*)

GENERAL: Son, if necessary, you guard this carrot with your life! America (*Or "your country."*) needs you. Understood?

CONRAD: (*Not so sure.*) Yes, sir.

GENERAL: Excellent! If you need me, use your radio.

CONRAD: Roger, sir.

GENERAL: I'll be inside polishing my boots. (*Pauses. Looks down at boots.*) Again.

CONRAD: Got it, sir.

GENERAL: Very well. Good lad! (*Exits.*)

CONRAD is left alone. At first, he stands very stiff and alert. Gradually, his posture slackens. He starts to nod off, wakes up, nods off, etc. Finally, he falls to the floor, curls up in a ball, and sleeps.

After a moment, CRAIG, JEAN, and BELINDA enter. BELINDA ends up closest to center stage, facing away from the carrot. FRANCIS, follows. As they talk, FRANCIS hands out glasses of sparkling cider to each of them.

CRAIG: Sweetie, I am SO delighted that you were able to come home for a visit!

JEAN: Yes! Your professors weren't too upset, were they?

BELINDA: No mother. I have straight As, remember?

CRAIG: Well, you'd better! Why do you think I donate so much money to the school?

CRAIG and JEAN laugh.

BELINDA: Actually, I work really hard...

JEAN: *(Blowing her off.)* Of course you do, sweetie!

BELINDA: But I do. Just last week in Art class I sculpted a—

CRAIG: Francis, we need some celebratory drinks! Sparkling cider, please.

FRANCIS: They're in your hands, sir.

CRAIG: Oh! Would you look at that! Francis, you are the best!

FRANCIS: Thank you, Mr. Cromwell.

BELINDA: So, what exactly are we celebrating, Dad?

JEAN: Oh, it is a very special family achievement, honey!

CRAIG: Yes! If your Great Grandfather Archibald Cromwell were here today, to see just what his specially mineralized water was capable of producing, why he would just be beside himself!

JEAN: *(Getting emotional.)* Oh it's just so wonderful!

JEAN moves to CRAIG and hugs him.

CRAIG: It sure is, petunia. Isn't this special, Francis?

FRANCIS: Indeed, sir.

CRAIG: Well said, old boy.

BELINDA: OK, so... is someone ready to tell me what this special thing is?

JEAN: *(Pulling away and straightening up.)* Oh my, excuse me dear! Of course, of course. *(Pause.)* Belinda sweetie, turn around.

BELINDA turns and her eyes go wide as she looks down at the carrot.

BELINDA: Oh - my - gosh!

CRAIG: Incredible, right? Isn't it incredible, Francis?

FRANCIS: Truly, sir.

CRAIG: You said it!

BELINDA: Is that a—?

JEAN: Yep, it's a carrot! Can you believe it?

BELINDA: It's... it's huge!

JEAN: We know!

BELINDA: And you guys grew this?

CRAIG: Indeed we did! I had water from our family well specially diverted this way to irrigate it.

BELINDA: And this is what happened? Mom, Dad, that's incredible! Exactly how big is it?

JEAN: Record-setting, probably. We can't really be sure, of course, because most of it is underground.

BELINDA: Well, let's find out right now!

BELINDA moves to JEAN and hands her back the glass.

JEAN: Oh, sugar, we can't—

BELINDA: Of course we can! *(Crossing to the carrot.)* This is a remarkable achievement! Let's pull it up right now!

At that, CONRAD sits up quickly. He does so in such a way that he is not initially facing CROMWELLS.

CONRAD: What!?! *(He stands and turns to face BELINDA.)* Do NOT pull that carr—

Light change. BELINDA'S and CONRAD'S eyes meet, and the chorus of a cheesy love song plays. After a few moments, we hear a needle-scratching sound as:

JEAN: Conrad! Why, I didn't even see you there!

CONRAD: *(Still looking at BELINDA.)* I mean, um, please... pretty please... if you'd be so kind... to not pull the carrot, I would appreciate it.

BELINDA: *(Equally tranced.)* Oh. I see. OK.

CRAIG: Belinda, honeybunch, I don't believe you've met Conrad. He's the General's son. They moved in while you were away.

BELINDA: A General moved in next door? Wow!

JEAN: Well, her last name is General.

CRAIG: And her first.

BELINDA: Oh. That's an unusual name. So she's *not* a real General?

JEAN: Oh no, she definitely is.

BELINDA: So, she's General General General?

CONRAD: Yeah. My grandparents had high hopes.

BELINDA: Guess it worked.

CONRAD: Yeah.

They stare at each other for a moment and sigh.

CRAIG: So, Connie my boy, what are you doing out here?

CONRAD: Huh? Well, my mom asked me to stay out here and guard the carrot. I guess I must have fallen asleep. You won't tell, will you?

CRAIG: Goodness no! Mum's the word. Right Francis?

FRANCIS makes a zipping-mouth-shut motion. CRAIG laughs out loud.

CRAIG: Ha-ha! This guy...

JEAN: Protect the carrot? My heavens! From who?

CONRAD: The Ornerys, ma'am.

JEAN: Oh, I was afraid of this. Dear, you'll just have to go have a word with Thaddeus!

CRAIG: Yes, I suppose I will.

BELINDA: Why? Mom, what's going on?

JEAN: Well, dear, you see, there is a little bit of a debate about whose carrot this *actually* is.

BELINDA: But I thought you told me that you guys grew it.

JEAN: Of course we did.

CRAIG: Well, your great grandfather's water did, anyway.

JEAN: But some of the neighbors, you see, they decided to contribute some of their own things.

CRAIG: The Fargins cooked up some vitamin concoction in that lab of theirs...

JEAN: And Mr. Ornery planted it in some of that special soil of his. You know, that smelly stuff that he sells at farmers' markets.

CONRAD: And I provided the seed!

BELINDA: (*Turning to him, dreamily.*) You did?

CONRAD: Yeah. I got it at school.

BELINDA: And you brought it home and planted it here so that everyone could share it?

CONRAD: *(Pause.)* Uhhhhhhh... *(Obviously lying.)* Yes! Yes, I did!

BELINDA: You are SO thoughtful!

CONRAD: I know, right?

FRANCIS: Ahem. Excuse me sir, but it's time for your massages.

CRAIG: Oh, look at the time! We don't want to keep Dolores waiting!

CRAIG and FRANCIS exit.

JEAN: *(Crossing to BELINDA.)* She is going to be SO excited to see you pumpkin!

BELINDA: You know, why don't I stay here and help Conrad guard the carrot?

CONRAD: Awesome!

JEAN: Oh, don't be silly! We have so much catching up to do!

She starts to lead BELINDA away. As she does, BELINDA keeps looking back at CONRAD.

BELINDA: But we Skype [Or insert FaceTime, or whatever.] every night. You insist.

JEAN: It's not the same thing! Come on, we'll have tea, get manicures, have our hair done, *(Ad-libs until they are gone.)*

CONRAD: Well, I guess I should go tell my mother about her. I mean, this. This situation... with the carrot... is what I need to report. *(Pauses, then he runs off quickly.)*

Shortly after he's off, ONE, TWO and THREE enter. TWO leads the way, looking around, closing eyes, sniffing the air, etc. THREE follows, looking through binoculars, jotting some notes, maybe taking some measurements, etc. ONE (wearing a chef's smock and hat) stands upstage holding a large pot and a box that the pot will go on.

TWO: (Standing downstage center, "feeling" the air.) Yes, this is the place. I can just feel it.

THREE: Sure. Good a place as any.

TWO: I sense a great deal of disagreement here.

THREE: OK, Obi Wan. Where do we settle?

TWO: One, what do you think?

THREE: One just wants to put the pot down. She just needs you to tell her where.

TWO: Let's see... (Wanders upstage center.) Here. Right here. (Motions to the top of the "+" upstage center.) This is it. (Two crosses downstage center and sits in a "meditation" pose.)

ONE puts the box down and sets the pot next to it. She sits on the box, fans herself, then pulls a really long handkerchief from somewhere small (perhaps a shirt pocket) and wipes the sweat from her brow. She then opens the pot and takes from it an upright glass of water and drinks. When she's done, she puts it back.

She then proceeds to place the pot on top of the box. THREE continues to check out the area, takes notes, etc. ROBOT enters, followed by BILLY. ROBOT stops, turns, and sits on the ground, full back. BILLY then sits up against ROBOT'S back.

BILLY: (Sigh.) Someday, Robot, we'll have our day in the sun.

THREE: Trouble, partner?

BILLY: (Standing, startled.) Oh my gosh! I didn't see you there.

THREE: Oh, no worries. We can't all be aware of our surroundings.

Besides, it's not like there are three of us or anything, one with a giant pot and another sitting right in front of you...

BILLY: (Laughs.) I guess I've got my mind on some other things...

THREE: Understandable. (He goes back to his work.)

BILLY: So, um, who are you?

THREE: We are surveyors. We're just, you know, checking things out.

BILLY: Surveying?

THREE: You got it.

BILLY: Well, does anyone know you're here?

THREE: Yeah. You.

BILLY: I don't remember—

THREE: Well, you and your friend there.

BILLY: Oh, that's not a friend. Well, not a *person* friend. It's just Robot.

BILLY manipulates the buttons so ROBOT stands and turns.

THREE: Robot?

BILLY: I know, I know...

ONE goes over to ROBOT and circles it once, looking it up and down. ROBOT stares straight ahead. Once she's done, she makes a flower appear and hands it to ROBOT.

BILLY: Oh, it can't—

ROBOT: *(Taking the flower.)* Oh my. It is lovely.

BILLY: *(Pauses.)* Hm. Robot, you don't even know what that is. We never programmed you to—

ROBOT: *(Smelling them.)* Mmm. Roses *[Or any flower.]* My favorite. They smell delightful.

BILLY: *(Pauses. Looks at Three.)* That's new.

TWO: *(Suddenly opens her eyes and stands.)* It's time. *(She exits.)*

ONE starts to pull utensils out of the pot - a wooden spoon, a whisk, a knife, an apron, etc. There should be more things than it appears could fit in the pot.

BILLY: *(Watching her off.)* Umm, time for what?

THREE: Time for One here to make her famous soup.

BILLY: Soup?

THREE: You betcha.

BILLY: But I thought you guys were just land surveyors.

THREE: Oh we are. And surveying land works up the ol' appetite, know what I mean? *(Laughs. Slaps BILLY on the back.)*

BILLY: He-he. Yeah. And, where did she go then?

THREE: Oh, Two went to get the ingredient.

BILLY: Ingredients?

THREE: Ingredient, yeah.

BILLY: Ingredients?

THREE: That's what I said – ingredient.

BILLY: Like singular? One ingredient?

THREE: Don't knock it till you've tried it.

BILLY: Oh, I can't. I mean, my dad – he's making dinner tonight.

THREE: Suit yourself.

BILLY: You know, Robot, maybe we should get go—

He turns around to see ROBOT standing over the pot next to ONE, apron on and wooden spoon in hand.

BILLY: How did you do that?

ONE holds up the remote. BILLY looks down at his hands, shocked that he doesn't have it.

TWO: *(Enters carrying a rock.)* It's perfect! *(Crossing up to ONE.)* Just perfect! *(Showing it to ROBOT.)* I found it just over the hill. *(To ROBOT.)* What do you think?

ROBOT: Excellent choice.

TWO: Your new friend seems very nice.

ONE nods and smiles.

TWO: Here you are dear.

ONE takes the rock from TWO, and slowly places it in the pot. They all look at it. Pause.

BILLY: That's it?

TWO: What?

BILLY: That's the one ingredient? A rock?

TWO: Oh, yes. Just wait until you see what One here can do with it.
Delicious, my friend!

THREE: I tried to tell him...

BILLY: But I've never seen – I mean, soup usually has – you know – other stuff in it.

TWO: Other... stuff?

BILLY: Yeah...

ROBOT: I know a wonderful recipe for soup which includes lentils. I shall proceed to the pantry to obtain some. (*Exits.*)

BILLY: Dad does make a pretty mean lentil soup. I'll go see if Robot needs help. (*He starts to go, but stops when he hears THADDEUS.*)

THADDEUS: (*From offstage.*) Wallace? You out here?

BILLY: It's Mr. Ornery.

THADDEUS enters with JUNIOR and JUNIOR 2.

THADDEUS: All right, Wallace, my kids here tell me you'd like to have a word or two about the - (*Stops. He sees ONE, TWO, and THREE.*) Who are y'all?

THREE: Land surveyor, sir. (*Shakes his hand.*) We won't be long.

THADDEUS: I see. (*Pauses. Looks THREE up and down, not letting go for a while.*) J.T., keep yer eye on this here feller.

JUNIOR 2: Sure thing, Pa. (*Crosses next to THREE, pulls out slingshot, aims it toward THREE, and stays frozen like that.*)

TWO: Mr. Ornery, you're just in time! Could I interest you in some soup?

THADDEUS: Soup? No, (*Indicating BILLY.*) I just need to talk to that Fargin kid's dad.

TWO: Language, Mr. Ornery! There's no need for name-calling!

THADDEUS: What the blazes are you talkin' 'bout?

ROBOT re-enters carrying a bag of lentils and crosses over to ONE and the pot. WALLY follows, crosses to BILLY.

WALLY: Billy, what on Earth is going on? Why is Robot taking all my lentils? And why is it dressed like that?

THADDEUS: All right, Wallace, you got me here. What 'ya want?

WALLY: Thaddeus! Hi! I'm glad you came over! Would you like to come in?

THADDEUS: No.

WALLY: (*Slight pause.*) OK. Well, you see Thaddeus... Thad. Can I call you Thad?

THADDEUS: No.

WALLY: All right. That's fine. You see—

THADDEUS: The Juniors here tell me you was tryin' to pull up my carrot out the ground.

WALLY: Well, I guess... technically... that would be correct.

THADDEUS: You ought not do that.

WALLY: Yes, I knew you would say that. But you see, in all fairness, Thad – Thaddeus, sorry – we don't really agree that this carrot is yours.

THADDEUS: I s'pose yer gonna spout off again 'bout yer mumbo jumbo vitamins.

WALLY: Now, now, it's not exactly mumbo jumbo, Thaddeus.

THADDEUS: That carrot is nowhere near that big if'n it ain't in my soil!

WALLY: Your—psssh! You think— (*Continues ad-libbing.*)

THADDEUS: That soil took me years to develop!

They start arguing/yelling at each other over the carrot. After a bit, ONE wafts the air over the pot and blows the scent in their direction. There is a "magic" sound and lights flicker. They immediately stop arguing.

WALLY: What is that smell?

THADDEUS: Some kinda soup. The surveyors here are makin' it.

WALLY: Surveyors? Oh, I didn't even realize you were here.

THREE: (*Looking at BILLY.*) Apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it?

BILLY: Guess not.

JUNIOR 2: You hush, mister.

WALLY: (*Crossing upstage center.*) You're cooking what now? Is that why you wanted all my – Robot, is that all you have in there? Lentils? And – a rock? What is that doing in—

TWO: Would you like a taste Wallace?

WALLY: Wally. Since when is cooking in a land surveyor's job description?

TWO: Wally! How fun! Why, you'll find that One is one of the best cooks you've ever known.

ONE shrugs and smiles.

TWO: Just take a taste!

WALLY: Well, you can't just – I mean, all there is are lentils! You need olive oil and some onions first. You know, I think I have some in the kitchen. Billy, come help.

BILLY and WALLY exit.

THADDEUS: You know, I ain't never seen a dry soup. That ain't actually a soup. That's just – cooked stuff.

TWO: Mr. Ornerly, I assure you, once you try this, your taste buds will dance with delight!

THADDEUS: I'm not sure I want my taste buds dancin'. But, if you're gonna cook soup, ya might as well cook soup. Ya know, my wife Ellie makes her own vegetable broth.

TWO: Does she now?

THADDEUS: Might be just the thing you need.

TWO: Really!? One, what do you think? Should we try Mrs. Ornerly's vegetable broth?

ONE nods.

THADDEUS: Juniors, go tell yer mama we need three or four quarts of that vegetable broth she makes. I know she's got some stored up.

JUNIOR: Sure thing, Pa! C'mon J.T.

JUNIOR 2: OK, (*To THREE.*) but I'm warnin' you mister! I can shoot a ground squirrel blind right 'tween the eyes from three hunnerd yards away! So don't try no funny bizness!

JUNIORS exit. JUNIOR 2 backing out, eyes still on THREE.

THADDEUS: Sometimes, I think that kid ain't right.

THREE: You don't say...

THADDEUS: I did say it.

THREE: I know.

THADDEUS: Then why'd ya say I didn't?

THREE: You know, I am just going to go over here and see if they need any help. (*Crosses upstage center.*)

CRAIG enters with FRANCIS following.

CRAIG: Thaddeus! My dear fellow, I thought I heard you out here! My my, who are your friends?

THADDEUS: They ain't my friends. They're the land surveyors. Well, them three are anyway. That one there's the Fargin's robot.

CRAIG: Oh, yes, Robot. They still haven't given it a better name?

THADDEUS: Nope.

CRAIG: Tsk, tsk. Poor thing.

THADDEUS: What ya want Cromwell?

CRAIG: Oh, of course. Well, you see, I have an urgent matter to discuss. I didn't want to seem too brash, or come across as too strong and demanding—

THADDEUS: You couldn't if ya tried.

CRAIG: Oh, thank you.

THADDEUS: Not a compliment.

CRAIG: I see. In any case, I took the trouble to express my concerns in a letter. Francis?

FRANCIS: Very good, sir. (*He hands THADDEUS the letter.*)

THADDEUS: Lemme guess, this here letter says somethin' 'bout how due to the carrot growin' so big on account'a yer special mineralized water, you believe it's yers. Am I right?

CRAIG: Umm, well...

CRAIG looks back at FRANCIS, who shrugs.

CRAIG: Perhaps you should read the letter.

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