

VIRGIL GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

By Eddie McPherson

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SYNOPSIS: Virgil has never really been successful in life, yet he has always dreamed of doing something important. After finding a play he wrote when he was a little boy growing up in Lickskillit, Virgil decides to send it off to Hollywood, California to see if anyone is interested in producing his “masterpiece.” Sure enough, he almost faints when he gets a call from Hollywood asking him to bring the play to them. HOLLYWOOD! The folks in Lickskillit celebrate Virgil’s unexpected success. He is featured in the local paper and there’s a parade in his honor. His ship has FINALLY come in and he, at last, can hold his head high. But when Virgil finds out WHICH Hollywood calls, his excitement dies quickly. But how can he break the news without total humiliation? Throw in a new baby named Virgil Junior, a deputy who thinks he’s Barney Fife, an ex-girlfriend from Virgil’s past who is out to rekindle the old flame, and a few flashbacks from Virgil’s childhood and you have a hilarious and fun play that is as southern as sweet tea and cornbread.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 females, 7 males, 2-4 either, extras; gender flexible)

AGNES (f/m).....	Narrator. <i>(14 lines)</i>
ETHEL (f/m).....	Narrator. <i>(13 lines)</i>
MABEL (f/m).....	Also a narrator. <i>(14 lines)</i>
VIRGIL SLUDGE (m).....	A simple fellow with a big dream. <i>(186 lines)</i>
MARGARET SLUDGE (f)	Virgil’s patient wife. <i>(126 lines)</i>
ELLARD (m).....	Virgil’s best friend since childhood. <i>(72 lines)</i>
BERTHA MAE (f).....	Virgil’s sister and Ellard’s fiancée for the past 15 years. <i>(90 lines)</i>
PETER THE METER READER (m)	Has a crush on Bertha Mae. <i>(42 lines)</i>
GERTHA (f)	Has a crush on Ellard. <i>(17 lines)</i>

RHETT (f/m)	Lives inside Annabelle’s head (<i>Non-Speaking</i>)
MRS. SOPHIA TISHWATER (f).....	President of the Cultural Arts Committee in Hollywood, Alabama. (<i>78 lines</i>)
MR. TISHWATER (m).....	Mrs. Tishwater’s henpecked husband. (<i>29 lines</i>)
CRANK DILLINGER (m).....	Resident of Hollywood, Alabama and is true to his name... he’s cranky. (<i>48 lines</i>)
ANNABELLE DILLINGER (f)	Crank’s crazy daughter who has been head-over-hills for Virgil since high school. (<i>75 lines</i>)
DEPUTY (m).....	The deputy of Hollywood, Alabama who dresses and acts like Barney Fife. (<i>32 lines</i>)
YOUNG VIRGIL (m).....	Portrays Virgil as a young boy. (<i>28 lines</i>)
MS. DINGLEDINE (f)	Virgil’s 6 th grade teacher. (<i>22 lines</i>)

EXTRAS:

PEOPLE IN HOLLYWOOD PARK (f/m)

MEMBERS OF THE CULTURAL ARTS COMMITTEE (f/m)

NOTE: In the original production, the characters of Peter, Gertha and Rhett were played by the same actor; however, they may also be portrayed by individual actors just as effectively. You may also choose to have more than three narrators and redistribute their lines if this better suits your needs. If the narrators are played by males, change their names accordingly.

NARRATOR OPTIONS: Narrators may either enter and exit for dialogue or sit in chairs extreme stage left or right while watching the action.

PROPS

MARGARET – Baby in blanket, blanket, book, various clothes to fold including boxers, baby clothes, bag with robe, cigar and sunglasses, record, two phone receivers, disposable diaper, suitcase and jacket, cake

VIRGIL – Script, tackle box and sandwich on paper plate, telephone

PETE – Clipboard, photograph, box of candy, flowers, frying pan, broom, breath-spray

BERTHA MAE – Purse

ELLARD – Hot Wheel, helium balloons, camouflage cap, checkers and checkerboard, “applause” box, lawn chair

CRANK – Slingshot, starter pistol, litter stick (something to pick up trash)

ANNABELLE – Hand fan, love letter, cutout* of Virgil, necklace with 4-leaf clover attached, whistle

DEPUTY – Fake ducks, pistol, book of tickets, flowers

MRS. TISHWATER – Stuffed dog, copy of *Our Town*, phone receiver

YOUNG VIRGIL – New script, phone receiver, painting

MS DINGLELINE – Papers (she’s grading) and pen, list of words for spelling bee

CAST – Various play scripts of *Our Town*

GERTHA – Lawn chair

**The cutout of Virgil that Annabelle carries around with her can be accomplished in a couple of ways. Take a life-sized cutout that already exists and simply glue Virgil’s head on it. Or take a picture of the actor playing Virgil in full costume and enlarge the photo. Online companies like Fathead.com can create a professional cutout. Either way will work.*

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play takes place in four different locations: The Sludges' living room, Hollywood Park, Kudzu Playhouse and a crossroads at a caution light in Lickskillit. For this reason, each set should remain minimal and easy to change. For example:

THE LIVING ROOM: A small sofa, side table for the phone, baby's crib, small rocking chair, a free-standing window, and two optional free-standing doors.

HOLLYWOOD PARK: A simple bench, a few free-standing plants and an optional sign displaying the name of the park.

KUDZU PLAYHOUSE: A bare stage, a few wooden chairs and a wooden lectern.

LICKSKILLIT CROSSROADS: Two lawn chairs, a few free-standing plants and either a hanging, fake caution light or a slide of a caution light reflected on the back wall.

NOTE: Have an organized plan in place for scene changes. They should be quick and seamless so as not to slow down the momentum of the show.

SOUND EFFECTS

Baby crying

Bluegrass music

Sound of children laughing and playing

Sound of children screaming and crying

Phone ringing

Fanfare music

Crickets

Duck quacking

Applause and laughter (Applause box)

“Alfred Hitchcock Presents” theme music (also called “*Funeral March of a Marionette*” by Charles Gounod)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**ACT ONE**

- SCENE 1: SLUDGE'S LIVING ROOM
SCENE 2: PARK IN HOLLYWOOD, AL
SCENE 3: SLUDGE'S LIVING ROOM
SCENE 4: KUDZU PLAYHOUSE (HOLLYWOOD, AL)
SCENE 5: SLUDGE'S LIVING ROOM
SCENE 6: PARK IN HOLLYWOOD, AL

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1: BARE STAGE SEGUE TO SLUDGE'S LIVING ROOM
SCENE 2: LICKSKILLIT CROSSROADS
SCENE 3: KUDZU PLAYHOUSE (HOLLYWOOD, AL)

COSTUME NOTES

VIRGIL: Short-sleeve plaid shirts, pocket protector, horn-rimmed glasses, pants a little too short, bow tie and suspenders for his trip to Hollywood.

MARGARET: Plain cotton dresses or overall shorts. Dresses a little nicer when she goes to Hollywood, but not much. Her hair stays a little mussed. She may or may not wear glasses.

NARRATORS: Plain cotton dresses if women, overalls if they're men. They live in Lickskillit.

ELLARD: Bright shirts, overalls, camouflage hats.

BERTHA MAE: Same type of dress style as Margaret, but make sure they don't wear the same colors when on stage together.

PETER THE METER READER: Hard hat, orange worker vest.

GERTHA: Plain, tacky dresses.

RHETT: Black dress jacket with gray vest and white cravat.

MRS TISHWATER: Nice blouses, sweater tied around her shoulders, fashionable skirts or dresses. She needs a big caboose.

MR. TISHWATER: White shirts and bowties with matching suspenders, flat cap.

CRANK: Camouflage hat with ear flaps and camouflage shirts.

ANNABELLE: Antebellum-type gowns with matching hats (optional) in the fashion of Scarlet O'Hara in "Gone with the Wind."

DEPUTY: Dresses as close to Barney Fife on the "Andy Griffith Show."

YOUNG VIRGIL: White shirts, bow ties, red suspenders, plaid pants.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Matronly dress with old-fashioned pointy glasses.

DEDICATION

*To my dad who I lost this year.
Going home will never be the same.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING: *The Sludge's living room, one afternoon.*

AT RISE: MARGARET sits in the rocking chair slowly rocking her baby Virgil Junior. AGNES, MABEL and ETHEL enter and stand extreme stage left or stage right. (NOTE: You may choose to have one or two narrators or more than three with lines redistributed if these options better suit your needs.)

AGNES: Once upon a redneck time in a simple little community called Lickskillit...

ETHEL: Lived a simple little family in a simple little house...

MABEL: Not far down the road from a simple little caution light that hovered above the only intersection in town.

AGNES: These are the Sludges.

ETHEL: This is their town...

MABEL: And this is their story.

MARGARET: (*Singing slightly off-key to the tune of "Rock-a-bye Baby."*) Rock-a-bye baby and the three cops. When the wind blows, I can't read my clock. When the cow brays, the farmer will call. And then will slide baby down the hall wall.

AGNES: Margaret Sludge rocks her first-borned son, Virgil Junior, ever' day 'bout the same time and puts him down for his nap.

ETHEL: Margaret was a good mama.

MABEL: Terrible singer, but a good mama.

MARGARET: (*To the baby.*) Oh, looky at that. Childhood is such a special time. Don't be in a hurry to grow up, my angel. (*As "Rock-a-bye Baby" plays softly, she stands, crosses to the crib and lays the baby in it. She stretches, crosses to the sofa, sits, takes a magazine, covers her legs with a blanket and begins to read.*) Nice and peaceful at last.

VIRGIL: (*Screaming offstage.*) Margaret?!

SFX: BABY CRYING.

MARGARET: (*Frustrated.*) Virgil!

VIRGIL rushes in holding a beat-up notebook.

VIRGIL: Margaret, there you are! (*Holds out the notebook.*) Look what I – Did you know the baby's cryin'?

MARGARET: Virgil Sludge, I JUST got him to sleep.

VIRGIL: (*Sits the notebook on the arm of the sofa and crosses to the crib.*) Poor fella must 'a had a nightmare.

MARGARET: YOU woke him up, YOU put him back to sleep. (*Stands and starts folding clothes from a basket.*)

VIRGIL: (*Scoops up the baby and stands by the crib.*) Come to Daddy, little man. That's it. (*The crying stops.*)

MARGARET: (*Folding clothes.*) All I ask is for a minute's peace. That's all. Read a little. Get some house work done.

VIRGIL: (*Baby-talk to the baby.*) House work? She makes the beds, washes the dishes and six months later she starts all over again. (*To MARGARET.*) Hey look, he thinks I'm funny.

MARGARET: Well, you ain't. Virgil, when are you goin' to start fixin' up this place?

VIRGIL: (*Looking around.*) What is wrong with this house?

MARGARET: Well, for one thing last night I laid in bed lookin' up at the stars and I thought to myself, where the heck is the roof?

VIRGIL: You're so funny I forgot to laugh.

MARGARET: Have you worked on that crooked kitchen floor lately? The floor sits crooked which means the stove sits crooked which means ever' time I bake a cake, it comes out CROOKED! I laid the baby on a quilt while I cooked supper last week and he rolled right out the back door. Look what my life has become.

VIRGIL: Yeah, you are pretty lucky, ain't you?

MARGARET: I don't care how long it takes for you to get him to sleep. You WILL rock him and rock him and rock him 'til the COWS come home if you have to, but I got things to do.

VIRGIL: (*Returns the baby to the crib.*) Margaret, he's asleep. Shhhhhhh.

MARGARET: (*Folding a pair of colorful boxers.*) And I guess all that rockin' I did ahead of time didn't help a tall.

VIRGIL: (*Rushes to MARGARET and grabs the boxers.*) Margaret, what are you doin'? You want the whole world to see my underwear?

MARGARET: There ain't a soul around.

VIRGIL: (*Looking out the window.*) You never know when somebody might be lookin' through the window.

MARGARET: I wish you would hurry up and get your job back.

VIRGIL: (*Defensive.*) I was laid off, now can I help that I was laid off?

MARGARET: (*They've had this conversation before.*) No, Virgil, you can't help it that you was laid off. I ain't blamin' you. I never said I was blamin' you.

VIRGIL: (*Pulls a small calendar from his pocket.*) I know why you're so grumpy, it's that time of the month, ain't it?

MARGARET: None of your business.

VIRGIL: Yep, the 15th. Rent is due.

MARGARET: You're so funny I forgot to laugh...again.

VIRGIL: (*Back to the window.*) I'm so sorry I get in your way.

MARGARET: Who you lookin' for?

VIRGIL: (*Childlike.*) I ain't lookin' for nobody.

MARGARET: Virgil, don't bother the meter reader when he gets here. He has a job to do. He don't have time to stand around and listen to your borin' fishin' stories.

VIRGIL: You ain't my boss. He likes talkin' to me.

MARGARET: (*Holding up more underwear.*) What did you say?

VIRGIL: (*Braver.*) He LIKES talkin' to me. You make me sound like the most borin' person in the world. (*Grabbing the boxers.*) And QUIT showin' off my drawers to the whole world. (*There's a knock at the door.*) There he is! Hide my boxers.

MARGARET: Lawd, you have GOT to get back to work.

She exits with a few folded clothes as VIRGIL opens the door. There stands PETE.

VIRGIL: Petel! Great to see you!

PETE: Oh, YOU'RE home. (*Turns to leave, but VIRGIL grabs his elbow and pulls him in.*)

VIRGIL: Come in, come in! How are things? Heard it might rain. Heard you got a divorce.

PETE: Well—

VIRGIL: Heard it was for health reasons.

PETE: Yeah, she got sick of lookin' at me.

VIRGIL: Hey, that's pretty funny. Listen, I got a divorce joke.

MARGARET enters for more clothes.

VIRGIL: *(Continued.)* What should a woman do if she sees her ex-husband rollin' round on the floor?

MARGARET: Shoot him again. *(She exits.)*

VIRGIL: *(Shouting to MARGARET.)* That's not the right answer!

PETE: *(Presents a clipboard.)* I just need this paper signed, Mr. Sludge.

VIRGIL: Guess what. Drove the pickup into town last week and bought a whole bunch of fishin' lures. Let me grab 'em and show 'em to you.

PETE: But I just need your—

VIRGIL: No trouble at all, I'll be back before you can say: Love is grand, divorce is fifteen grand.

PETE: I really don't have time—

VIRGIL runs out as BERTHA MAE enters and shouts through the front door. It's quite clear she's upset.

BERTHA MAE: And I never want to speak to you again! *(She slams the door and speaks to PETE.)* I mean it too. *(Opens the door and shouts through it.)* I NEVER want to speak to you ever agaaaaain! *(Slams the door.)*

PETE: Howdy there, Bertha Mae. I'm Peter.

BERTHA MAE: I don't really care, 'cause I'm maaaaad.

PETE: Last name's Jeeter.

BERTHA MAE: How do you know my name?

PETE: I've been watchin' you. What I mean is, I've seen you hanging up your wash on your clothes line when I come to your daddy's house to read his meter.

BERTHA MAE: *(A little flattered, she finds PETE attractive.)* You sound like a stalker, Mr. Jeeter.

PETE: I promise I ain't no stalker.

BERTHA MAE: It's like that movie I watched on Lifetime Movies for Women called "The Stalker."

PETE: I saw part of that movie. I would've seen the whole thing but you closed your livin' room curtains.

BERTHA MAE: (*Hands on hips.*) I beg your Dolly pardon? That, sir, is the definition of a stalker.

PETE: (*Crosses to her and presents a picture.*) Oh yeah? Would a stalker take a picture of you walkin' into the Piggly Wiggly two days ago?

BERTHA MAE: (*Takes the photo.*) Ohhh, I look so cute in them coolots. I mean, how dare you. (*Hands it back to him.*)

PETE: (*Slipping the picture back into his pocket.*) I'm sorry if I made you mad.

BERTHA MAE: Before you get too carried away, I think you should know that I'm spoke for.

PETE: I know, I know, by that redneck called Ellard. But you know what they say, "All's fair in love and spyin'."

BERTHA MAE: (*Fanning herself.*) I must ask you to respect my courtship with my boyfriend. Besides, Ellard's love is young, vibrant and fresh as a newborn kitten.

PETE: How long y'all been datin'?

BERTHA MAE: Fifteen years.

PETE: (*Points at her.*) Aha!

BERTHA MAE: If my Ellard knowed you've been stalkin' me this way, there's no tellin' just what his jealous tendencies would lead him to do.

ELLARD enters and points to BERTHA MAE.

ELLARD: You better appreciate me, Bertha Mae, or I might up and disappear forever.

BERTHA MAE: We live in Lickskillit with one crossroad and a caution light. How you goin' to disappear?

ELLARD: It's called camouflage. (*Puts on a camouflage cap and strikes a pose.*)

BERTHA MAE: You don't appreciate me, Ellard. How many times have I told you that we need to put the magic back in our relationship?

ELLARD: I offered to saw you in half.

BERTHA MAE: And if you don't quit takin' advantage of me, you might just lose me to the arms of another man. (*Flirty.*) Right, Mr. Jeeter?

PETE: (*Nervous now that ELLARD is here.*) I don't know what you're talkin' about. I'm just waitin' for a signature.

BERTHA MAE: But you follow me around takin' my picture.

PETE: Gollee, lady, you make me sound like a stalker.

ELLARD: Don't pay her no mind, mister. She's been tryin' to make me jealous ever since I asked her to marry me 15 years ago. (*"Whispers" to him.*) Ever' time I turn around she's pretendin' there's a feller makin' eyes at her.

PETE: Look, I don't want to get in the middle of y'all's lover's spat. (*Shouting.*) Mr. Sludge, I really need to go!

VIRGIL enters with a tackle box and a sandwich on a saucer.

VIRGIL: Sorry it took me so long, Mr. Pete, but I wanted to make you a bologna sandwich.

PETE: Maybe next time. If you will just sign this, I'll be on my way.

ELLARD: (*Rushes to VIRGIL holding up a Hot Wheel car.*) Virgil, look what I done found down at the flea market.

VIRGIL: That's a real beauty, Ellard.

ELLARD: It's a 1970 Chevelle. It's what they call a connector.

VIRGIL: I think you mean collector.

PETE: Have a good day.

VIRGIL and ELLARD are looking at ELLARD'S Hot Wheel collection in a Ziploc bag as PETE crosses to the front door where BERTHA MAE is standing. PETE kisses BERTHA MAE'S hand then exits.

BERTHA MAE: Ellard, did you see that?

ELLARD: See what?

BERTHA MAE: Peter Jeeter just kissed me and you didn't even see it.

VIRGIL looks puzzled at ELLARD.

ELLARD: (*Whispering.*) Makin' things up again.

VIRGIL: Bless her heart. (*To BERTHA MAE.*) And where was you standin' when he kissed you, sister of mine, between the pink unicorn and polka dotted elephant?

VIRGIL and ELLARD laugh.

BERTHA MAE: You stay out of this, Virgil.

ELLARD: He must have been wearin' camouflage, 'cause I sure didn't see him.

ELLARD and VIRGIL laugh.

BERTHA MAE: He was NOT wearin' camouflage.

VIRGIL: Ring, ring! *(Answering the phone.)* Hello? Hold on and I'll ask her. Bertha Mae, it's Brad Pit, he wants to know if he can come over and give you some sugar too.

She turns away. MARGARET enters with a feather duster.

MARGARET: What y'all laughin' at?

BERTHA MAE: *(Rushing to her.)* Margaret, I have a big, ugly problem.

MARGARET: Oh, and how IS Ellard?

ELLARD: Heeeey!

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, Peter Jeeter just kissed me.

MARGARET: Peter Jeeter the meter reader?

BERTHA MAE: I told him I was already spoke for, but he said all's fair in love and spyin' and then he kissed me. *(Pulls her over.)* And the scary part is, I didn't hate it. It was so nice that I saw cannons goin' off. And not just a regular cannon, but the Civil War-type cannon that says, "Hey, we are serious here, so you better pay attention!"

MARGARET: *(Pitifully with a hand on her shoulder.)* Bless your heart.

VIRGIL: Bless your heart.

ELLARD: Bless your heart.

BERTHA MAE: You know what? Just forget all of you. Who cares if any of you believe me? *(Rushes to the crib.)* I will just play with the baby, he loves me for who I am.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, no...I just put him down for his – *(It's too late, she picks him up)*

BERTHA MAE: Hey there, little feller.

MARGARET: *(Sighs and picks up the notebook VIRGIL brought in before.)* What's this?

VIRGIL: *(Ruses to her, grabs the notebook and hides it behind his back.)* That's why I was lookin' for you earlier. *(Takes it.)* Margaret, what if I told you that you won't never have to worry no more 'bout a crooked kitchen floor?

MARGARET: Here we go again.

VIRGIL: What's that supposed to mean?

MARGARET: I can see it in your four eyes. You've come up with another one of your "I found a way to get rich and famous real quick" schemes.

VIRGIL: It ain't neither.

MARGARET: Then what is it?

VIRGIL: *(Pause.)* Well, this time I REALLY did come up with a plan that will make us rich and famous.

MARGARET: *(Sighs.)* Okay, what do you have behind your back that's goin' to make us rich and famous?

VIRGIL: Are you ready? Ta da! *(Holds out the notebook.)*

MARGARET: THAT'S goin' to make us rich and famous?

VIRGIL: As sure as I'm sittin' here. *(Beat.)* As sure as I'm standin' here.

AGNES: Virgil could see in their eyes they couldn't wait to see what was goin' to help them live in the lap of lunacy...uh, luxury the rest of their lives.

ETHEL: Meanwhile, over in a little community called Hollywood, Alabama some excitin' things was about to come about there too.

MABEL: Well, excitin' for Hollywood, Alabama, that is. Through the magic of theatre [the-ate-er] we now transport you to the humble little Hollywood Park in Hollywood, Alabama.

AGNES: It ain't that magical. Just stagehands with strong backs.

MABEL: Oh, hush up. Music!

SFX: BLUEGRASS MUSIC PLAYS UNTIL SCENE IS CHANGED.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING: *A park in Hollywood, Alabama. The same afternoon. A park bench and a sign that reads HOLLYWOOD PARK along with a few free-standing trees. SFX: SOUND OF CHILDREN PLAYING AND LAUGHING.*

AT RISE: *During the blackout, CRANK roles in. NOTE: In the original production, CRANK gets around in an electric wheelchair. If this isn't available, a manual wheelchair may be used. The chair is used for funny sight gags throughout the show. However, if you choose for CRANK not to use any type of chair, that's fine too.*

CRANK: *(Looking over the heads of the audience, speaking sarcastically.)* Oh, look at that. Little children laughin' and playin' in the park. Such a sweet, innocent sight to see.

CRANK reveals a slingshot, and flings something at the "children."
SFX: *SOUND OF CHILDREN SCREAMING AND CRYING.*

Bull's eye.

He laughs. ANNABELLE runs in and looks behind her as though someone is following her. She's dressed like Scarlett O'Hara complete with large-brimmed hat.

ANNABELLE: Oh, my, my, my. I think I lost him, Daddy.

CRANK: *(To himself.)* My crazy daughter has done went and found me. *(To her.)* Good, good, sweetheart. In that case, get over here and set by your old daddy and enjoy the peaceful solitude.

ANNABELLE: *(Still looking around her.)* Well, okay, Daddy, but just for a little ol' minute. *(She sits on the park bench.)* Look what I found in my hope chest, Daddy. *(Shows CRANK an old letter.)*

CRANK: I thought you wasn't supposed to open your hope chest 'til you got married.

ANNABELLE: The latch was gettin' rusty.

CRANK: *(Hands her a small bag.)* Throw these here breadcrumbs on the ground for your daddy.

ANNABELLE: But, don't you want to know what I found?

CRANK: Breadcrumbs first.

*She takes the bag and throws pretend crumbs onto the ground.
CRANK readies his slingshot.*

Come on, little birdy, it's supper time. *(He shoots at an invisible bird.)* Drat, missed it. I'll get you next time, smart aleck!

ANNABELLE: *(Unfolding the letter.)* This is what I found in that there hope chest. It's a love letter Virgil Sludge wrote to me when we was in high school back in Lickskillit.

CRANK: Virgil Sludge wrote you a love letter?

ANNABELLE: Listen and I'll read it to you. *(Clears her throat, standing.)* Dear Annabelle. Please quit tellin' the other kids that me and you are goin' steady, 'cause we AIN'T goin' steady. We never HAVE went steady and we never WILL go steady. I like somebody else, so leave me alone... Do I have to spell it out for you? A-L-O-A-N. Alone. Yours truly, Virgil Sludge. *(She holds the letter to her chest.)* He was ever so romantic.

CRANK: How can a daughter of mine call THAT a love letter?

ANNABELLE: Oh, Daddy, you have to read between the lines. What Virgil was really sayin' was that he liked me but he was just too shy to say it out loud. *(Beat.)* Why are you starin' at me like that?

CRANK: You done lost your ever lovin' mind.

ANNABELLE: *(Melodramatically.)* Fiddle-dee-dee. Findin' this letter again has gave me new hope that one day my one true love will come lookin' for me and make me his once and for all.

CRANK: Now, Annabelle –

ANNABELLE: I told you to call me Scarlett.

CRANK: Scarlett is NOT your name. You've watched that darn movie so many times, you've lost all track of reality.

ANNABELLE: When I save up enough money, I'm makin' it legal and ever'body shall call me Scarlett.

SFX: SOUND OF A DUCK QUACKING.

Oh, Daddy, look at that big flock of ducks flyin' overhead. Ain't they pretty?

CRANK: Shore enough. *(He brings out a pistol and shoots into the air.)* Bingo!

ANNABELLE: Daddy, you shot that poor, innocent duck out of the sky.

CRANK: Be a good girl and go fetch it for your daddy 'fore somebody else finds it.

ANNABELLE: Well, okay, Daddy, but I feel real sorry for that little ol'—

As she starts to exit, DEPUTY enters holding a dead duck. DEPUTY'S dressed like and walks similar to Barney Fife from "The Andy Griffith Show."

Look, Daddy, it's the stupid deputy you always talk about.

CRANK: I ain't blind.

ANNABELLE: Good afternoon, Deputy.

DEPUTY: Is it? Is it a good afternoon? Is it REALLY a good afternoon? Maybe it's a good afternoon for you. Maybe it's a good afternoon for me. But I don't think it's a very good afternoon for this duck here.

ANNABELLE: What do you know about that.

DEPUTY: Would you happen to know anything about this dead duck, little Annabelle?

ANNABELLE: My name is Scarlett.

DEPUTY: Just because you're beautiful, don't think you can change the subject.

ANNABELLE: If you'll excuse me, my daddy shot a duck and I've got to go find it.

DEPUTY: He DID, did he? *(Approaches CRANK.)* Well, well, well if it ain't the pistol-totin' duck killer.

CRANK: You ain't got a lick of proof I shot that duck out of the sky.

DEPUTY: Nothin' but that smokin' gun in your lap. *(Takes a pad from his hat.)* It looks like I'm goin' to have to teach you a lesson.

CRANK: You ain't writin' me a ticket are you, Deputy?

DEPUTY: *(Writing the ticket.)* Hollywood is a friendly and peaceful town and I can't let the likes of you do whatever you feel like doin'.

Nip it. I got to nip it in the bud. Give me the gun.

CRANK: *(Points behind DEPUTY.)* What's that?

DEPUTY looks and CRANK turns the chair and begins to roll in the opposite direction. DEPUTY turns and crosses behind the bench and cuts him off. CRANK, without saying a word, does a 360 and heads in the opposite direction. DEPUTY slowly crosses and cuts him off again. CRANK stops his chair. DEPUTY holds out his hand, CRANK hands him the gun and DEPUTY puts it in his back pocket. DEPUTY rips off the ticket and hands it to CRANK.

DEPUTY: You need to pay this ticket within 90 days or you're goin' to the big house.

CRANK: Just for that, I'm tellin' ever'body 'bout you handin' out 50 parkin' tickets at the drive-In movie.

DEPUTY: Don't you dare! (*Hitching his britches, he crosses in front of CRANK. When he does, CRANK secretly snatches the pistol from DEPUTY'S back pocket.*) Annabelle, I guess you like seein' a man in uniform take charge the way I done.

ANNABELLE: How can you say you're takin' charge when you won't do nothin' 'bout that stalker of mine?

DEPUTY: Now, sugar, I done told you I think this so-called stalker is just a filament of your imagination.

ANNABELLE: Great balls of fire. Don't bother me anymore and don't call me sugar. There's a man followin' me ever' where I go. Daddy, tell him I ain't seein' things.

CRANK: She ain't seein' things, Deputy. (*Motions the DEPUTY closer.*) She's crazy as a loon. Been that way ever' since Virgil Sludge broke up with her 20 years ago.

MR. TISHWATER runs in holding a box of popcorn.

MR. TISHWATER: (*Yelling.*) You better run for your lives, 'cause she's comin' with a big surprise.

But before anyone can move, MRS. TISHWATER enters sporting one of the biggest rear ends in the south. She holds a stuffed dog.

MRS. TISHWATER: Hello, hello, hello! So, this is where (*Sarcastically.*) Hollywood's finest are spending their day. Mr. Tishwater, come hold your child.

MR. TISHWATER: That is NOT my child.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Closes her eyes.)* I swear, I'm married to a ninny.

CRANK: *(Holding up his slingshot.)* Hold that dog up, I need target practice.

MR. TISHWATER: I didn't want to buy the dog. You wanted the dog, you hold the dog.

MRS. TISHWATER: You're embarrassin' me in front of my committee. Everyone gather around, for I have some exciting news. As members of Hollywood's Cultural Arts Committee, such as it is, you're the first to hear. I am bringing the classic play *Our Town* to our little hamlet. *(Pause.)* This is where you applaud. *(Unenthusiastic applause.)* It's high time we bring a little culture to Hollywood. I am calling a meeting tonight at the theatre promptly at six o'clock to discuss the details. I'm counting on all of you to be there. Come, Mr. Tishwater.

MRS. TISHWATER exits causing her rear-end to bounce from side-to-side. MR. TISHWATER stands there eating his popcorn. ALL look at him.

MR. TISHWATER: I like my women like I like my coffee, cold and bitter.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Offstage.)* Now!

MR. TISHWATER: *(Shouting off to her.)* I wear the pants in my family!

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Offstage.)* Don't make me say it again! *(He bows his head and exits.)*

CRANK: *(Shouting off to him.)* You wear the pants alright. Under your apron!

DEPUTY: If that don't beat all. Now we have to go to the theater and listen to the old battleax ramble on for hours. Annabelle, I'll see you later. *(To CRANK.)* And I don't want any of your wisecracks as I walk away.

DEPUTY hitches his britches, gives one more good look ANNABELLE'S way and exits.

CRANK: *(Shouting after him.)* I don't know where you got that face from, but I hope you kept the receipt!

SFX: SOUND OF DUCK QUACKING.

There's a beautiful duck right up there.

Points his pistol to the sky as ANNABELLE runs over to him.

ANNABELLE: Daddy, no. You heard what the deputy said. He'll throw you in jail.

CRANK: Don't worry, hun. Daddy done put a silencer on my pistol. Come here, little ducky. *(He shoots the gun with a loud bang.)*

ANNABELLE: Daddy!

CRANK: Uh-oh, I've done it now.

ANNABELLE: Daddy, you've got to hide.

CRANK: You're right. Don't tell him which way I went. *(He rolls off stage.)*

ANNABELLE: *(Shouting after him.)* I'll head off the loony bird if I see him comin, Daddy. *(She sits on the bench and looks at the letter VIRGIL wrote her.)* Oh, Lord, will me and Virgil ever be together? Please send me a sign from Heaven. *(She looks at the ground.)* What's that? I can't believe it. A four leaf clover. *(Picks it and holds it next to her heart.)* Oh, thank the good Lord in Heaven. This is a sign that Virgil Sludge WILL be mine once and for all.

DEPUTY reenters holding two ducks. He looks around.

DEPUTY: Crank Dillinger, where in Sam hill are you? Crank?

He exits the opposite side of the stage as ANNABELLE sings a song such as "Someday My Prince Will Come." ANNABELLE'S stalker, dressed a little like Rhett Butler, enters and stands behind ANNABELLE as he looks straight out over the audience. ANNABELLE senses him and stops singing.

ANNABELLE: Hello?

CRANK reenters with his chair in high gear and rolls across the stage looking straight ahead and exits the opposite side. DEPUTY runs back in.

DEPUTY: Crank, dad burn it, come out and face me like a man!

He exits the other side of the stage as ANNABELLE holds her four-leaf clover and looks out dreamily. Her song such as "Some Day My Prince Will Come" reprises as lights dim and the set is changed back to the SLUDGE'S living room picking up right where the last scene left off.

AGNES: Crazy little Annabelle sat for hours and hours in Hollywood Park singin' her hopeful little song.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

SETTING: *The Sludge's living room. A few minutes later.*

MABEL: We take you back now to the Sludge's livin' room where Virgil was just about to reveal his special surprise.

MARGARET: *(Pointing to the notebook.)* That's goin' to make us rich and famous?

VIRGIL: As sure as I'm sittin' here. *(Beat.)* As sure as I'm standin' here.

MARGARET: What in tarnation is it?

VIRGIL: Somethin' I found when I was cleanin' up the attic.

BERTHA MAE and ELLARD join them.

You see, when I was just a little tyke, I used to make up stories in my head.

MARGARET: *(Sarcastic.)* We didn't figure you made up stories in your feet, Virgil.

VIRGIL: I would write poems and short stories and such as that.

ELLARD: *(Snickers.)* Virgil wrote poetry.

VIRGIL: Sure did. My most favorite poem I ever wrote went like this: Hickory dickory dock, three mice ran up the clock. The clock struck one, but the other two escaped with minor injuries.

BERTHA MAE: *(To ELLARD.)* Why can't you ever come up with romantic poetry like that? *(Hits ELLARD in the back of the head.)*

VIRGIL: One day my sixth grade teacher gave us an assignment. And that assignment was to write a play.

BERTHA MAE: You wrote a play, Virgil?

VIRGIL: *(As YOUNG VIRGIL and MS DINGLEDINE enter for a flashback scene.)* I'll never forget how I couldn't wait for my teacher Ms. Dingledine to read my play so I could see what kind of grade I got on it.

Flashback as lights change if possible. YOUNG VIRGIL is standing behind a wooden chair as MS. DINGLEDINE sits behind a small desk grading papers.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, what are you doin' at school so early on a Monday mornin'? Is this about your homework?

YOUNG VIRGIL: No ma'am.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, I need you to look me in the eye and tell me the truth. Did your daddy help you with your homework last night?

YOUNG VIRGIL: No ma'am, he pretty much did all of it.

MS. DINGLEDINE: You have GOT to learn to do your own homework.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Yes ma'am.

MS. DINGLEDINE: And while we're on the subject, I hope I didn't see you lookin' at Eugene Tate's test yesterday.

YOUNG VIRGIL: I hope you didn't see me either.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, you have to have more confidence in yourself. You can do the work if you just try.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, if I just try.

MS. DINGLEDINE: So, why are you here this morning?

YOUNG VIRGIL: Well, you've had our plays for over a week now and I was just wonderin' if you've had a chance to read mine yet.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Oh, your play. Uhhhhh, yes, Virgil, I read... *(Finger quotes.)* your play.

YOUNG VIRGIL: You did? Did you like it? Do you think it was good?

MS. DINGLEDINE: *(Reluctant.)* Well, Virgil, it's like this...

YOUNG VIRGIL: I didn't sleep a wink last night wonderin' what you thought about it.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, have a seat. *(He sits in the chair facing her desk.)* Virgil, I think this is one assignment you actually did on your own.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Yes ma'am. It was fun.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Let's start with the title of the play *Our Town*.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Right. I called it *Our Town* 'cause the play is about me and my friends growin' up poor in Lickskillit.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, *Our Town* is already a famous play.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Gosh, and I just wrote it.

MS. DINGLEDINE: What I mean is that *Our Town* has already been written.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, I wrote it last week.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil –

YOUNG VIRGIL: You liked my play, didn't you? I can tell. You'll never know how much this means to me, Ms. Dingledong.

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, my name's... Never mind. *(Gets a good, long look at VIRGIL and we can tell she doesn't want to disappoint him.)* You worked really hard on this assignment, didn't you, Virgil?

YOUNG VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, I wrote night and day. Like my mama always taught me, an escalator can never break, it can only become stairs.

MS. DINGLEDINE: *(Pause.)* Virgil?

YOUNG VIRGIL: *(Leans in to her.)* Yes ma'am?

MS. DINGLEDINE: *(Pause.)* I think your play...

YOUNG VIRGIL: *(Leans in more.)* Yes ma'am?

MS. DINGLEDINE: I think you wrote... *(She just can't tell him the truth.)* A real good play.

YOUNG VIRGIL: *(Jumps up.)* I knew you would like it. I'm much obliged to you, Ms. Dingledang! What kind of grade did I get? *(Reaching for the script.)*

MS. DINGLEDINE: *(Holding the script up next to her.)* You know what, Virgil, I forgot to write a grade on it. I'll give it back to you after school.

YOUNG VIRGIL: *(Claps his hands.)* Wait 'til I tell the other kids about this. They're always makin' fun of me for fallin' down and having to wear these thick glasses. But wait 'til I tell them I wrote a good play. That will show 'em.

YOUNG VIRGIL runs off as MS. DINGLEDINE looks after him. She places the play on her desk and gets an idea. She rips off a piece of paper, tapes it on the front of the script, then takes her red pen and writes a grade on the piece of paper. She looks around to make sure no one saw this. She takes the script and exits.

VIRGIL: *(As the mini set is moved.)* I says to her I says, 'I'm much obliged to you, Ms. Dingleling.'

MARGARET and BERTHA MAE: DingleDINE!

VIRGIL: I says, wait 'til I tell the other kids. They're always makin' fun of me for fallin' down and wearin' thick glasses... but wait 'til I tell them I wrote a good play. That will show 'em. The best part is yet to come. Look at this.

He turns the old notebook around and shows them the front of it where there is a big A+ written on a faded piece of white paper taped to the front of the script.

MARGARET: Virgil, you got an A+?

VIRGIL: Big ol' A+, sure did.

MARGARET: I'm so proud of you.

ELLARD: Gollee, I ain't never saw one before, *(Touches the grade.)* so that's what an "A" looks like.

BERTHA MAE: *(Takes the script and flips it open.)* What's your play about, Virgil?

VIRGIL: Well, like I said, I based it on me growin' up here in Lickskillit, but I disguised it as bein' about a small fictitious town I called Blueberry, South Carolina, with a sheriff named Sandy Baylor who lives with his Aunt Dee and his boy Opium. He works with his bumbling deputy sidekick Barnaby who can't never do nothin' right. And the whole town of Blueberry looks up to their sheriff.

MARGARET: *(After a second.)* Virgil, you got that from "The Andy Griffith Show."

VIRGIL: For your information, "The Andy Griffith Show" took place in Mayberry, North Carolina - not Blueberry, South Carolina.

BERTHA MAE: Virgil, you knucklehead. Andy, Sandy. Mayberry, Blueberry.

MARGARET: Aunt Bea, Aunt Dee. Deputy Barney, Deputy Barnaby.

VIRGIL: (*Offended.*) So, what exactly are y'all sayin'? That I stole my whole play from "The Andy Griffith Show"?

MARGARET: Pretty much.

BERTHA MAE: Yep.

This makes VIRGIL sad as he takes his script from BERTHA MAE and has a seat on the sofa.

MARGARET: Bertha Mae, could you and Ellard excuse us for a second?

BERTHA MAE: (*Taking the baby from the crib.*) Sure, come on, Ellard, let's take the baby to the kitchen 'cause I'm hungry.

ELLARD follows her out.

MARGARET: Virgil, we didn't say all that to hurt your feelin's.

VIRGIL: I thought ever'body would be excited about my A+, Margaret.

MARGARET: We ARE proud; A+ is a big deal. Let me see the script.

(She takes it and flips it open.)

VIRGIL: (*Slowly stands and crosses to down stage.*) Margaret, when I was growin' up, there wasn't a day that went by that somebody didn't make fun of me, or push me down or laugh at me. (*Mocking.*) Virgil's so dumb, he thinks Johnny Cash is a pay toilet. (*Sigh.*) The only time I ever felt smart was when I talked to Ellard. I decided that when I grew up, I was goin' to show 'em all. I was goin' to be a real somebody in this great big world. And when I got that A+ that's the moment I knew my time had come at last. But when I told the other fellas about my grade, they laughed at me even more. (*Crosses back and sits beside MARGARET.*) I've been thinkin' lately...What have I ever done in my life to make you and Virgil Junior proud of me? The only answer I could come up with was, nothin'. I work in a podunk hardware store and I can't even afford to fix my wife's crooked kitchen floor. (*Sarcastic.*) Yay, Virgil. Here lately, I just been feelin' like one of them-there submarines.

MARGARET: Submarine?

VIRGIL: Just tryin' to keep my head above water.

MARGARET: (*MS. DINGLEDINE and YOUNG VIRGIL reenter.*) Virgil, you've done a lot of important things. What about the time you was in the Lickskillit Spellin' Bee?

MS. DINGLEDINE: Virgil, spell Mississippi.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Mississippi. Could you use it in a sentence, please?

MS. DINGLEDINE: The word I just gave you is Mississippi.

YOUNG VIRGIL: Are you referrin' to the river or the state?

MS. DINGLEDINE: Either.

VIRGIL: (*Thinking.*) Either. E-I-T-H-U-R, either.

MS. DINGLEDINE: I'm sorry, but that is incorrect. As a matter of fact, that ain't even close. Are you really that dumb, Virgil? Please leave the stage as you hang your head in shame.

YOUNG VIRGIL bows his head and exits.

Lawd! (She exits.)

MARGARET: Virgil, she did NOT say that last part.

VIRGIL: She might as well have, that's how I felt.

MARGARET: Virgil, you're right. I mean what do we know about such things? If a great teacher like Ms. Dingledine thought it was good enough to give you an A+ then who are we to say it ain't good?

VIRGIL: (*Grabs the script and stands again, excited.*) You're righter than rain, Margaret. Wait, I got so depressed, I forgot to tell you the most excitin' part yet. Where's Ellard and Bertha Mae?

ELLARD: (*Entering.*) Virgil, can I borrow your BB gun?

VIRGIL: What for?

ELLARD: We took the baby out back to play on the grass and a stray dog done drug him 'cross the road.

VIRGIL: What?

MARGARET: Ellard!

BERTHA MAE: (*Entering with the baby.*) Ellard, that does it, you are on probation. I cannot trust you with Virgil Junior no more. (*Puts him in the crib.*)

MARGARET: Ever'body listen up, Virgil ain't done tellin' us his news.

BERTHA MAE: Is this goin' to take all day?

VIRGIL: Well, like I was sayin' while ago, I found this here play I wrote when I was a little boy named *Our Town*.

ELLARD: They called you *Our Town* when you was a little boy?

VIRGIL: Shut up, Ellard. Anyway, I thought about puttin' my play on here in Lickskillit, but then I thought, no Virgil, you need to think big for once in your life, a A+ play should be put on in a A+ town, so I sent my play off to ...Are you ready?...Hollywood, California to see if they thought it was good.

BERTHA MAE: Hollywood, California? Virgil, boy, you're crazy.

VIRGIL: Why am I crazy?

MARGARET: Hollywood, California? (*Laughs.*) Virgil. (*There's a knock at the door.*) Bertha Mae, could you get that?

As *VIRGIL* talks, *PETER* presents *BERTHA MAE* with a box of candy, then flowers, then a frying pan, then an ugly stuffed animal then rushes out.

VIRGIL: It's like that famous sayin': If it ain't broke, fix it 'til it is. If at first you don't succeed, leave well enough alone. Birds of a feather flock together and crap on your car. One good turn gets most of the blankets. If all is not lost, where is it? Don't y'all see, if I was to get my play put on in Hollywood, we would finally know what it's like livin' on the top floor of a two-story outhouse?

MARGARET: (*Shaking her head in disbelief.*) Virgil, honey, I just don't want you to get your hopes up.

VIRGIL: Margaret. (*Words of wisdom.*) Think positive. Like my mama always said: Two wrongs don't make a right, but two Wrights did make an airplane.

MARGARET: That don't make sense.

ELLARD: I understood it.

MARGARET: You would.

VIRGIL: We writers are deep thinkers like that. (*He sees BERTHA MAE holding her gifts.*) Bertha Mae?

BERTHA MAE: Huh?

MARGARET: Where in the world did you get all that stuff?

BERTHA MAE: Didn't y'all see him? He was right here. Peter the Meter Reader gave me all this. (*They all stare at her for a second, then VIRGIL picks up the phone.*)

VIRGIL: Hello? Hold on and I'll see. Bertha Mae, (*He holds the phone out to her.*) it's Brad Pitt again.

The lights fade as the NARRATORS enter and the set is changed to Kudzu Playhouse.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

SETTING: *The Kudzu Playhouse in Hollywood, Alabama. That night.*

AGNES: Although Virgil was sure enough disappointed in his family's and friends' reaction, he wasn't goin' to let that change his mind about bein' somebody in this world.

ETHEL: Back in Hollywood, Alabama, the newly formed Cultural Arts Committee was about to meet in their Kudzu Playhouse.

MABEL: Which was really just an old barn with a flimsy stage.

AT RISE: *A bare stage with a podium or lectern and a few chairs. There's a sign hanging somewhere that reads in hand-painted letters "Kudzu Playhouse." MRS. TISHWATER enters.*

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Rushing in.)* This meeting will come to order.

MR. TISHWATER: *(Following her, eating popcorn.)* Shoudn't we wait until ever'body gets here?

MRS. TISHWATER: Mrs. Tishwater waits for no one.

MR. TISHWATER: We can't have a committee meetin' when the committee ain't here?

MRS. TISHWATER: Eat your popcorn and keep quiet.

MR. TISHWATER: *shrugs, sits and takes a big bite of popcorn.*

MR. TISHWATER: Why do you drag me to these things?

MRS. TISHWATER: Because we don't spend enough time together, that's why.

MR. TISHWATER: If you want us to spend more time together, then let me move the X-Box in the kitchen.

MRS. TISHWATER: You are so cruel. When I'm gone, you won't find another woman like me.

MR. TISHWATER: Who said I wanted another woman like you?

MRS. TISHWATER: You're impossible.

ANNABELLE enters with a life-sized cutout of VIRGIL. [Check Production Notes.]

ANNABELLE: Sorry we're late, Ms. Tishwater, but Daddy's chair got stuck in the mud.

MRS. TISHWATER: Never mind the excuses, just have a seat, we have already started our meeting.

ANNABELLE: But Daddy ain't in here yet.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Points to the cutout.)* And who is that, may I ask?

ANNABELLE: *(Touching Virgil's cutout ear.)* This here is Virgil Sludge.

MR. TISHWATER: What's a Virgil Sludge?

ANNABELLE: He's my life-long love and I'm waitin' patiently for him to come and sweep me off my feet.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Referring to the cutout.)* He will have to wait outside, only committee members are allowed in the meeting. Excuse me, sir, but you will have to go.

MR. TISHWATER: Put your glasses on, Sophia. *(She does.)*

MRS. TISHWATER: Oh my, that's atrocious. I feel as though he's staring at me.

ANNABELLE: Don't worry, Ms. Tishwater, you ain't his type.

MR. TISHWATER: That's funny, she ain't my type either. *(He eats a big bite of popcorn. CRANK enters riding in his chair. Note: If you're using extras for committee members, they enter here.)*

ANNABELLE: Daddy, you made it.

CRANK: Had to switch over to 4-wheel drive.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(To CRANK.)* Do you know how late you are? How many times have I told you that you are lazy?

CRANK: How many times have I told you that you're ugly?

This causes MR. TISHWATER to choke on his popcorn.

ANNABELLE: Don't mind him, Ms. Tishwater, Mama is always callin' Daddy lazy too.

CRANK: *(To MR. TISHWATER.)* She's right. The other day my wife said to me, "I'm fed up with you bein' so lazy. Pack your bags and leave!" I said, "You pack 'em."

CRANK and MR. TISHWATER have a good laugh.

MR. TISHWATER: Want some popcorn?

CRANK: Don't mind if I do. *(He takes some.)*

MR. TISHWATER: I'm lucky I guess. My wife is one in a million.

CRANK: Really? I thought she was won in a raffle. *(They laugh.)*

MRS. TISHWATER: Everyone quiet so we can get this meeting underway.

CRANK: *(To MR. TISHWATER.)* She's your wife. Can't you shut her up?

MR. TISHWATER: Listen, just chew your popcorn real slow and the crunch will drown out most of her talkin'.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Standing behind a small lectern.)* As you all know, I have been trying for the longest time to bring a little culture to our humble town of Hollywood. Well, Mrs. Tishwater has done it again. I have invited an acting troupe to bring us a play.

CRANK: What'd she say?

MR. TISHWATER: Just chew harder.

MRS. TISHWATER: The other day I received a script in the mail with a note saying they'll bring the play to us at no charge. The beautiful and classic play *Our Town*.

ANNABELLE: *Our Town*? I ain't never heard of that little ol' play. Have you, sweet thing? Virgil says he ain't neither.

MR. TISHWATER: Has Annabelle lost her marbles?

CRANK: Lawd. Last year, she was so lonely, I bought her a toy poodle to keep her company. She almost killed it tryin' to insert batteries.

MRS. TISHWATER: Gentlemen, if you could stop talking for one minute. *Our Town* is written by Thornton Wilder.

CRANK: Why can't we bring out some wrestlers to Hollywood? Now that's entertainment.

MR. TISHWATER: I agree. Besides them actor people are always up to no good. Who's that famous actress who stabbed a guy? Reese...?

ANNABELLE: Witherspoon?

MR. TISHWATER: No, with a knife.

MR. TISHWATER and CRANK laugh.

MRS. TISHWATER: Reese Witherspoon did NOT... Look, *Our Town* is a classic, you simpletons. They will bring the play to us and all we have to do is publicize and sell tickets. *(She looks at the men eating popcorn and ANNABELLE flirting with the poster.)* Those in favor of bringing *Our Town* to Hollywood, say I. *(Pause.)* Anyone? *(Pause, gives up.)* Fine, the I's have it.

ANNABELLE: *(To MRS. TISHWATER.)* Mrs. Tishwater, have you even read this play you're talking about?

MRS. TISHWATER: I don't have to read it. I was in a production of *Our Town* when I was just a girl. I played the part of Emily. I still remember the lines like it was yesterday.

CRANK: What's she sayin' over there?

MR. TISHWATER: Eat!

ANNABELLE: It sounds plum borin, but if you're dead set on it, let 'em bring the stupid play. Can we go now?

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Caught up in her moment.)* What? Oh, yes, I will call the director tonight and tell him we're all set. Meeting adjourned.

ANNABELLE: *(Picking up her cutout.)* Let's go, Virgil. We'll take a little stroll down by the Tennessee River. *(She exits.)*

CRANK: I'm thirsty.

MR. TISHWATER: Let's go for a soda.

CRANK: Follow me.

Music such as Alfred Hitchcock theme music plays as CRANK rolls out followed by MR. TISHWATER eating his popcorn. MRS. TISHWATER is left alone.

MRS. TISHWATER: *(Shouting off to them.)* I was a good actress. My high school drama teacher told me I had lots of potential. I still remember my favorite line! *(Softly quoting.)* "Does anybody realize what life is while they're living it - every, every minute?"

Soft music plays as she drops her head and exits as lights fade.

MABEL: Ah, poor Ms. Tishwater had some pretty big dreams of her own.

ETHEL: Sure enough, but she ended up in a small southern town with nothin' much to offer somebody like her.

AGNES: Bless her heart.

MABEL: Bless her heart.

ETHEL: Bless her ever lovin' heart.

AGNES: Later that night, back in Lickskillit, Virgil was waitin' patiently for that big call from Hollywood.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

SETTING: *We are back in Lickskillit in the Sludge's living room, that same night.*

AT RISE: *VIRGIL is pacing and ELLARD is playing checkers alone. MARGARET and BERTHA MAE are sitting on the sofa looking at baby clothes.*

MARGARET: *(Holding up a baby's outfit.)* And this one is to wear at church.

BERTHA MAE: It's just as precious as it can be.

VIRGIL: Why ain't they called, Margaret?

MARGARET: Virgil, settle down, you're makin' me a nervous wreck.

VIRGIL: It's been weeks since I sent my play off to Hollywood.

ELLARD: Virgil, sit down, it's your move.

VIRGIL: Ellard, I can NOT play checkers when I'm this nervous.

ELLARD: Fine, I'll play myself. *(He switches seats and moves a piece.)*

MARGARET: *(Holds up another baby outfit.)* And I thought this one would be cute to wear in the park.

ELLARD: *(Switches seats again.)* Aha, sucker! *(He jumps four times then switches seats.)*

BERTHA MAE: Margaret, I love it, love it, love it!

ELLARD: Man, I didn't even see that comin'.

BERTHA MAE: *(Rocking the baby.)* Ellard, don't seein' Margaret and Virgil happily married with a new borned baby put any ideals in your head?

ELLARD: *(Concentrating on his game.)* Like what?

BERTHA MAE: You know... *(She hums a bit of the "Wedding March.")*

ELLARD: Give me a hint.

BERTHA MAE: Lawd, I'm goin' to die a old maid.

SFX: THE PHONE RINGS.

MARGARET: Virgil, the phone's ringin'.

VIRGIL speaks as MRS. TISHWATER enters the opposite side of the stage holding a cell phone.

VIRGIL: What if it's them? I'm afraid they'll think I sound redneck.

MARGARET: You ARE redneck. Answer it.

VIRGIL: *(Sighs and answers the phone.)* Hello?

MRS. TISHWATER: Hello, is this Mr. Sludge?

VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, this is Virgil Sludge.

MRS. TISHWATER: First of all, allow me to apologize for your tragic last name.

VIRGIL: Much obliged. Can I ask who's speakin'?

MRS. TISHWATER: Yes, my name is Sophia Tishwater.

MARGARET: Who is it, Virgil?

VIRGIL: Some woman named Soapy Dishwater.

MARGARET: Must be a prank call. Hang up.

VIRGIL: Hold on. *(Back to the phone.)* Sorry, Mrs. Dishwater, my wife was talkin' to me.

MRS. TISHWATER: I think we may have a weak connection.

VIRGIL: *(To the room.)* She thinks we might have a creek infection. *(Back to phone.)*

MRS. TISHWATER: I'm callin' about the play you sent us.

VIRGIL: *(To the room.)* Anybody want to play tennis?

MARGARET: Give me that. *(Takes the receiver.)* Hello, who is this?

MRS. TISHWATER: Sophia Tishwater.

MARGARET: What you want, Ms. Dishwater?

MRS. TISHWATER: I'm calling in reference to the play you sent us.

MARGARET: *(To VIRGIL.)* She's callin' 'bout your play.

VIRGIL: My play? *(Takes the phone back.)* Are you callin' 'bout *Our Town*?

MRS. TISHWATER: *Our Town*, that's right.

MARGARET: Where she callin' from?

VIRGIL: *(To MARGARET.)* The only place I sent it to was Hollywood.

MARGARET: *(Beside herself.)* You mean she really is callin' from THE Hollywood?

VIRGIL: *(To phone.)* You're callin' from Hollywood, right?

MRS. TISHWATER: That's right, and we would like you and your troupe to come perform *Our Town* for us.

VIRGIL: *(To MARGARET.)* She wants me to bring my play to Hollywood.

ELLARD: *(Grabs the phone.)* I'll get to the bottom of this.

VIRGIL: Ellard, no!

ELLARD: Hello? This here is Ellard. Where you callin' us from, woman?

MRS. TISHWATER: Hollywood, Alabama.

ELLARD: *(To VIRGIL.)* Yep, bad connection, she thinks my name is Ali Baba.

VIRGIL: What?

ELLARD: She says, "I'm callin' from Hollywood, Ali Baba."

VIRGIL: *(Grabs the phone.)* Give me that. Sorry 'bout that Soapy, I'm sorry, I mean Ms. Dishwater, that was just my dumb friend, Ellard.

MRS. TISHWATER: Look, our connection is really bad. If you agree to come, we can call you next week to settle the details. We are so excited about this upcoming engagement.

VIRGIL: *(To MARGARET.)* Ooooooo, she sure is doin' some fancy talkin'. We done got ourselves a engagement.

MRS. TISHWATER: I am a big fan of Thornton Wilder and I've been wanting to bring him to Hollywood for years.

VIRGIL: *(Confused.)* Tell Mr. Wilder we'll be happy to meet him when we get there.

MRS. TISHWATER: Oh, Mr. Sludge you are so droll.

VIRGIL: Yes ma'am, but only when I eat pork.

MRS. TISHWATER: I'll be in touch. Ta-ta. *(She exits.)*

VIRGIL: Hello? *(To MARGARET.)* She must be at a dance, somebody was doin' the cha-cha. *(He hangs up and turns to MARGARET.)* I did it! Margaret, can you believe it? Didn't I tell you my play was good?

MARGARET: *(Sings to the tune of "The Beverly Hillbillies.")* Let me tell you a story 'bout a man named Sludge.

VIRGIL: *(Singing.)* Poor good-for-nothin' whose life wouldn't budge.

BERTHA MAE: *(Singing.)* And then one day he wrote a little plaaaaaay.

ELLARD: *(Singing.)* When the phone call came and it was Soapy Dishwater tellin' him they want to do his play and she called me Ali Babaaaaaa.

They celebrate as bluegrass music plays and the set is changed back to Hollywood Park.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

SETTING: *Hollywood Park. It's the next day.*

AT RISE: *Annabelle is sitting on the bench putting on a necklace.*

ANNABELLE: There, my little ol' four-leaf clover will sit here right next to my heart where it belongs. And now for the wish. Four leaf clover, bring my sweetheart back to me so that we can be together just as it was meant to be.

RHETT enters, sees ANNABELLE, sprays breath spray in his mouth, hitches his britches, and approaches her.

Not you again! How many times have I told you I am NOT interested in you? Virgil is my only love! Virgil, Virgil, Virgil!! *(Shouting.)* Help!

RHETT takes a step back.

Help me!

DEPUTY runs in and strikes a karate pose.

DEPUTY: What's the matter? Who called for help?

ANNABELLE: I did, Deputy. *(Points to RHETT who is frozen.)* That no-good scoundrel of a stalker is back and he was chasin' after me. Ooh, if I wasn't a lady, what wouldn't I tell that varmint?

DEPUTY: *(He can't see RHETT since he's only in ANNABELLE'S mind.)* Now, sweet little, Annabelle, what did your daddy and me tell you about makin' up these pretend boyfriends of yours?

ANNABELLE: He ain't my boyfriend, Virgil Sludge is my boyfriend, now are you goin' to go lock him up or not?

DEPUTY: Virgil Sludge? Now, where have I heard that name lately?

RHETT slowly exits.

ANNABELLE: You've heard somebody talkin' 'bout Virgil Sludge? Who, Deputy, who, who?

DEPUTY: *(Snaps his fingers.)* Sophia Tishwater, that's who. She called me on the telephone last night since I couldn't make it to the meetin' at the theatre.

ANNABELLE: Mrs. Tishwater didn't say anything about Virgil to us. She just talked about a stupid play. What did she say about Virgil? *(Grabs his arms.)* Tell me!

DEPUTY: Just can't keep your hands off me, can you?

ANNABELLE: *(This time she grabs his collar and raises DEPUTY to his tip-toes.)* Deputy!

DEPUTY: Okay, okay. She said Virgil Sludge is comin' to Hollywood for an engagement.

ANNABELLE: *(Shocked.)* A what?

DEPUTY: She told me Virgil Sludge is comin' to Hollywood for an engagement! He said it's somethin' he's been wantin' to do since he was a boy back in school.

ANNABELLE: Engagement? Oh, Deputy, are you sure that's what she said, Virgil Sludge is comin' here in for an... engagement?

DEPUTY: Now, will you PLEASE let go of my shirt?

ANNABELLE lets go of the DEPUTY'S shirt.

ANNABELLE: I can't believe it. *(Grabs her four-leaf clover.)* It's my four-leaf clover that done it. My life-long wish is comin' true, for my true love is finally comin' to ask me to... Oh, Deputy, I could kiss you.

DEPUTY: (*Stepping away.*) Now, hold it right there, sister. I am still on duty, so no kissin' aloud. (*Calmly.*) However, I get off duty at six o'clock sharp.

ANNABELLE: Wait 'til I tell my daddy. (*She runs off.*)

DEPUTY: (*Shouting after her.*) Do you want me to pick you up at your place?

CRANK secretly rolls in behind DEPUTY holding a litter stick. DEPUTY senses someone.

Who's there?

DEPUTY draws his pistol, pulls a "bullet" from his pocket and readies himself. CRANK touches the back of DEPUTY'S leg with his litter stick causing DEPUTY to raise his gun and fire causing a duck to fall from the sky. He sees the duck, panics and runs out. Music such as the Alfred Hitchcock theme music plays as CRANK rolls over to the duck, picks it up with the litter stick, and calmly rolls off stage as the lights fade to a BLACKOUT. Intermission.

END OF ACT ONE

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