

THE PRIZED GARDEN OF BEAVERTON PROPER

Written by
Kristofer James

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Final Revision #1

ourth.christopher@gmail.com
602-740-1297

ACT ONE - SCENE I

BUMPINPICKLES' HOME

LIGHTS come up on a cozy country style kitchen and family room. The space is neat and inviting. BEULAH HORTENSE BUMPINPICKLES (40's-50s) dressed in an apron and fanning herself, is on the phone. On a peninsula of her counter that extends out, there are cut flowers, a vase, gloves, etc. She makes a lot of arrangements from her prized garden. You can see that gardening is her life.

She speaks in a loud, warm, syrupy tone. TOMMY BUMPICKLES (20s), her son saunters in mid-conversation, rolling his eyes when he encounters his mother on the phone. The AC is broken, so she fans herself.

BEULAH

(on the phone,
fanning herself)

You're serious?! Me? Featured in the Beaverton Gazette? For my lil' ol' flower garden? Oh, my stars—I could just spit!
(beat, realizing))

Not literally, honey, it's just an expression. Anyway, I've been reading your paper since I was knee-high to a pig's eye! My goodness gracious—Grandma Agnes would be so proud, she's probably rollin' around in her little grave. (beat) What's that? Oh, no, not literally! (laughs) Never mind.

TOMMY

That got reeeeeal weird, real fast.

BEULAH

It wasn't five years ago I planted my first pussy willow—

TOMMY

Language, ma'am!

BEULAH

(still waving him off) —and boy has it grown something fierce! Oh, I'm very proud of how its blossomed—Hold? Sure, I'll hold.

TOMMY

(to himself) Why would the flower-namers of yester-year pick that name?

BEULAH

Son, I'm on the phone!

TOMMY

Did they not know what that it'd end up being slang for—

BEULAH

Tommy!

TOMMY

I was gonna say cat! Have some faith, woman.

BEULAH

Don't be fresh—it's too early.

TOMMY

Hard to stay fresh in this heat. Where's the frozen waffles?

BEULAH

It's in the name, Einstein. (into phone) Sorry—some folks got the manners of alley cats.

TOMMY

(meowing) Meow.

BEULAH

Yes, ma'am, my garden's thrivin'! Begonias, petunias, my clematis climbin' my lattice so purty—(catches Tommy mouthing along to pussy willow) (into phone, pointedly) My pussy willow—(to TOMMY, saying "don't" with her eyes)—is tall and vibrant. (to TOMMY) You ain't too old for a whoopin' with a weepin' willow branch.

TOMMY

Such violence!

BEULAH

You don't know violence. (into phone) Yes?

TOMMY

You sure can talk. You got enough tongue for ten rows of teeth. Make me a waffle.

BEULAH

Make your own damn waffle. (into phone) Oh, a reporter and a photographer? Really?! I feel like... Meryl Streep!

TOMMY

Meryl Streep probably makes award-winnin' waffles.

BEULAH

What time? Oh, I'll be here with bells on! Uh-huh... Bells? Never mind. Bye now!

TOMMY

Why'd you tell them you use a watering can? You know you use a hose.

BEULAH

Because it sounds elegant. My goodness, it's hotter than a jalapeño's armpit!

TOMMY

And the humidity... (poetically) "Like a shower you can never dry from..."

BEULAH

(looking at reflection in toaster) And look what it's doin' to my hair. I hope your daddy gets that damned thing fixed soon. It's slowly becoming the bane of my existence.

TOMMY

That's a toaster, Momma.

BEULAH

My hair's fallin' flat. Not today of all days! I'll have to call Mable for an appointment—it needs to last through Sunday service.

TOMMY

"Mable's—home of the luxuriously coiffed lady helmets of Beaverton Proper!" You know, if not for y'all, Aqua Net would've gone out with the Berlin Wall. Y'all have single-handedly kept the ozone tremblin' for years.

BEULAH

You're funny.

Church bell chimes. A distant cry.

CRYER

"Beaver call!"

TOWNSFOLK (OFFSTAGE)

"Slap those tails!" "Gnaw proud, Beaverton!" "Dam strong, dam proud!" "Go big or go gnaw!"

BEULAH

You hear that? That's community right there—unity in the shape of a holler.

TOMMY

Nine o'clock chime—means the last stick's been laid in the ceremonial Beaver Dam. (mock reverence) "Thank you, o'mighty beavers, for your architectural excellence and commitment to regional togetherness."

TOMMY makes his waffle, getting a plate, fork, syrup, etc.

BEULAH

Amen. Without them, we'd just be folks sittin' by a creek with no purpose.

TOMMY

With no paddle.

BEULAH

Son, I think that's a different kind of creek that you end up...up. (.) If you want somethin' from the Piggly Wiggly, let me know. (.) I saw the pertiest tin waterin' can there—baby blue, with a cute little daisy painted on the side. I think I'll buy it. Do you need anything?

TOMMY

Waffles.

BEULAH

You can't live off waffles, child. Eat an apple. You need vitamins, protein.

TOMMY

I get plenty of lead from our well water—that's iron, right?

BEULAH

Then I'll get you one of your daddy's vitamins.

TOMMY

Mama, if you put half the time into somethin' useful as you do fussin' over them flowers—

BEULAH

Take. The. Pill.

TOMMY

Didn't you graduate valedictorian?

BEULAH

Tommy Waldo Bumpinpickles! Are you trying to hurt my feelings before my Folger's crystals kicks in?

TOMMY

Brie says there's lots of causes out there that need someone like you.

BEULAH

Brie says, huh? I do good things! I give to the church—

TOMMY

Nothin' says humble servant of God like heated seats in the preacher's Cadillac, paid for by the suckers of the Beaverton Proper Baptist church.

BEULAH

Oh, hush. I collect toys, donate canned goods that I have personally canned—

TOMMY

I'm sure your pickled-pig lips are out there makin' quite a splash.

BEULAH

You'll never understand the thankless job of bein' a wife, a mother, and a giver.

TOMMY

Aunt Blanche said you scored in the top two percent of some national test back in high school.

BEULAH

I did. You're just dyin' to say somethin', so spit it out.

TOMMY

You could've gone anywhere. Just think there's more out there for you.

BEULAH

Oh, do ya now? Well, I think I've made plenty of myself. I'm dedicated. I'm right where I wanna be, thank you very much. And don't forget--I made you, didn't I?

TOMMY

Yes. Perfection incarnate.

BEULAH

You sure are. People used to say I had a perfect little ass--little did they know when they said that, they were talkin' about my *only child*.

TOMMY

Ooh! Look who thinks she's a comedian.

BEULAH

And that garden out there? Honey, that's just a little ol' speck of who I am. I don't remember raisin' you to be so... (thinking) what's the word...

TOMMY

Brilliant? Funny? Charismatic?

BEULAH

Oh, come on top 2% brain... What is the word... Snarky! That's it.

TOMMY

Alright, alright, showoff.

BEULAH

Mm-hmm. The apple don't fall far. It's not too late, you know. You could be an accountant or a businessman--Oh my goodness! You'd look so cute in a little blue suit!

She tries to hug him; he rolls his eyes.

BEULAH

My little baby boy... all grewed up. Anyway, anyone worth their salt in this town's been on the front page of the Beaverton Gazette Lifestyle section. Looks like it's my turn.

TOMMY

(flatly) Great.

BEULAH

(Beat) And rightfully so.

Awkward pause.

TOMMY

This isn't just to show off and wave it in your friends' faces like a winning bingo card, is it?

BEULAH

Thomas Waldo Bumpinpickles! You think I'm that shallow?

TOMMY

Yep. As shallow as the Beasley family gene pool.

They laugh. Beulah pretends to scold herself for laughing.

BEULAH

You know, the sweet baby Jesus can hear you.

TOMMY

Their family tree goes like this...

He mimes a straight tree trunk,
whistling down with a "pop."

BEULAH

Stop it! I think I just secured my ticket to hell for
laughin'.

(Beat)

You know, Snackcake's boy's eyes are just a little too far
apart. Like a giraffe.

TOMMY

Mother!

BEULAH

Whut?!

TOMMY

That's a first-class ticket!

BEULAH

If you tell anybody I said that, I'll call you a liar.

TOMMY

Ladies and gentlemen--welcome to the stage, the Queen of
Snark, Beulah!

BEULAH

That's right. And don't you forget it. (Beat) Don't you have
an interview comin' up?

TOMMY

Friday at three.

BEULAH

That could be a fantastic opportunity.

TOMMY

Flippin' burgers at Patty Whacker's ain't no opportunity.

BEULAH

It's better than doin' nothin'.

TOMMY

I do stuff.

BEULAH

You know what I mean.

TOMMY

Besides, I'm plannin' to work for Colby's daddy down at the Fuzzy Beaver for a bit.

BEULAH

The fuzzy what?!

BUFORD BUMPINPICKLES (40s-50s)
enters, kissing BEULAH quickly on
the lips as he heads for the
newspaper.

BUFORD

It's that bait and tackle shop, Beulah. Well—partly.
(to TOMMY)
That new family bought it. Brie's, right?

BEULAH

What's the other part?

BUFORD

A beaver taxidermy shop.

BEULAH

I just don't understand why everything's gotta sound so
naughty. I swear, people do it on purpose.

TOMMY

I think "fuzzy" just means "friendly," Mother. You might be
the one with the dirty mind.

BEULAH

I am not! I'm an absolute angel.

TOMMY

Sometimes *thangs* are just *thangs*, Mama—till somebody makes
'em somethin' they ain't.

BEULAH

And sometimes people disguise *thangs* when they know better.
I don't know why folks insist on uglifying up this world
with un-needed filth. It's tacky.

TOMMY

You're the one makin' the connection.

BEULAH

And that job at the "Fuzzy Beaver" ain't etched in stone.
The way you used to fumble through girlfriends—

TOMMY

There you go swearin' again, Mama.

BUFORD

He didn't fumble. He "explored his options," Beulah. Until, you know...

TOMMY

Brie's just a friend. You know that.

BEULAH

I'm tickled *pink* y'all met. But you gotta work. You gotta explore those options.

TOMMY

I might get hired to do a mural of a majestic beaver family on the side of the courthouse!

BUFORD

(sweetly) Beulah, leave the boy alone.

BEULAH

A mural? Then what? You need to be explorin' the grown-up world of hard work—one that culminates into - a - paycheck.

TOMMY

I am, Momma. I just don't wanna drive a combine or stand in a factory all day... or flip burgers. No offense.

BUFORD

None taken.

(picking up phone)

Not to interrupt this wholesome family moment, but that son-of-a-bitch AC ain't cooperatin'. Gotta call Shively's and get Buck out here.

(into phone)

Hey Sheila! Buck around? Buck! Can you come take a look at this damn unit? I'm about to drive it out to the middle of nowhere and leave it for dead—(trails off)

BEULAH

I know you're meant for more. You got talents I could only dream of havin'.

TOMMY

Thanks for noticin'.

BEULAH

But all that "art stuff" won't pay the bills.

TOMMY

"Art stuff?" Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence.

BEULAH

When I was your age, I worked at the Grin 'n' Grub. Your daddy flipped burgers. I was the fry girl--and very popular.

TOMMY

Welcome to the lifestyles of the mediocre and sorta-known.
How'd I not know this?!

BEULAH

Oh honey, I was a legend! Everyone raved about my perfectly seasoned and crisp fries. I was even crowned Miss Beaver Queen that year.

TOMMY

You got a crown for slingin' fries?

BEULAH

I got notoriety. It was a prestigious event! We had categories—best rhinestoned casserole dish, fastest pie-coolin', and for talent: interpretive log rollin'.

TOMMY

Get outta here.

BEULAH

For real! I rode on a beautiful float in the shape of a pink beaver tail—'til it broke down behind the Dollar General.
(beat) Politics, plain and simple.

TOMMY

Wasn't Thelsie Mae the one to beat? Rumor has it, you stole it from her. Didn't it come with a scholarship?

BEULAH

Thelsie Mae?! Please. It never matters who wins; there's always someone yellin' "rigged!"

TOMMY

She's your friend, Momma.

BEULAH

(speeds up, animated)
For my talent, I could've had a hundred back-up line dancers, duetin' with Reba McEntire herself, doin' double backflips into a champagne glass, finishin', in that champagne glass with the queen of waterworks, Esther Williams herself, in a synchronized water routine—while Thelsie came out clangin' pots and pans together, unrhythmically, and somebody would have still said it was rigged!

TOMMY

Take a breath! I'm just sayin' what I heard.

BEULAH

That's straight-up scandalous, salacious, lip-flappin' gossip! She gets one sip of liquor and—

(mimes yapping hand)

BUFORD

(finishing call)

Buck'll be out to fix the AC. Heard it was actin' up already. Small-town perks, huh?

TOMMY

You mean gossip flows faster than the Mississippi.

BEULAH

I wouldn't call that a perk.

BUFORD

I like small-town life. Better to be a big fish in a small pond.

TOMMY

Depends what kind of fish you are.

BEULAH

Well, he's my big, hunky fish! (to TOMMY) And for your information, it was not stolen.

TOMMY

Sure, Momma.

BEULAH

Thelsie Mae slung fries at the Hamburger Hootenanny—

TOMMY

Who comes up with these names?

BEULAH

—and her taters were limp, soggy, and seasoned like she was coverin' up a crime. She didn't have my golden touch, like moi.

BUFORD

Yours were always crisp and flavorful, darlin'.

BEULAH

Aww, Boofy, you know they were!

TOMMY

Are we seriously rehashing the fried tater wars of '87? My therapist will love this.

BEULAH

Like you see a therapist. Mister, doin' anything is better than "fryin'" your brain playin' vidya games all day. (beat) Oh! Listen to me—did I just make a funny?

BUFORD

You're a regular Joan Rivers, darlin'.

BEULAH

Ha! I am, ain't I!

TOMMY

Her humor was just a tad darker, I think.

BUFORD

You know, I heard they have the seniors at Whisperin' Willow play those same games—to keep their brains sharp.

BEULAH

Stop it. Really?

BUFORD

Swear it. A sea of grey hair, walkers, and the sound of machine guns. It's quite a... What's the word? Juxtaposition. That's the word, right?

BEULAH

Yes, and a good one! Wait—those old men play that Auto Grand Car Theft game?

BUFORD

Grand Theft Auto, I think its called?

BEULAH

You're jokin'.

TOMMY

Nope. I even play with Great Aunt Blanche. She's not just pressin' buttons—she's conductin' a *symphony of domination*.

BEULAH

I don't believe it.

TOMMY

I swear!

BUFORD

She got an online name?

TOMMY

See-nile Sniper.

BUFORD

(chuckling)

Not sure about the "sniper" part.

BEULAH

Buford! That's not nice!

Tommy and Buford laugh.

BEULAH (CONT'D)
Take out the trash, Tommy. Now!

TOMMY
Alright, alright! Geez.

BEULAH
And put that plate in the sink! I am not your personal maid!

BUFORD stands and approaches
BEULAH, facing her, both
deliberately trying to annoy TOMMY
with their PDA.

BUFORD
Ahh... The Grin n Grub. I flipped burgers there all through
high school—and I flipped over you, darlin'.

BEULAH
You looked so strong and handsome in that red-striped apron.
'Member that? Ooh-wee!

BUFORD
You think so?

BEULAH
Oh, yes. One look at those big muscular arms holdin' that
spatula, I melted faster than the cheese on 'em hamburgers.

TOMMY
Gross!

BUFORD
You fawned over me like the big squirrel with a stash of
acorns.

BEULAH
The biggest stash of acorns, I'd say.

TOMMY
So Momma liked you for your nuts?

BEULAH
THOMAS WALDO BUMPINPICKLES! Not everything is a double
entendre! Please, Buford—beat your child!

TOMMY
(as Forrest Gump) Double entendre is as double entendre
does.

BEULAH

He had the car, the job... that's all I meant! Stop making it scandalous.

BUFORD

(changing the subject) Are you heading into town today?

BEULAH

I am. I'm runnin' by the Piggly Wiggly to grab some stuff to make a... (purposely pronounces it wrong-like "con - ape) canape for the reporter.

TOMMY

It's pronounced can-a-pey, Ms. Stewart. Only cultured ladies make it into fancy newspapers.

BEULAH

I know, smartass. I was just testin' ya. Finger foods. That better?

TOMMY

I ain't the one tryin' to get into a gossip rag. (Cockney accent) Don't forget the Cheese Whiz and Saltines whilst yore out, me Lidy.

BEULAH

Let's talk about something more positive.

BUFORD

Leave your mother be.

TOMMY

I wouldn't be me if I did that!

BEULAH

As soon as you were old enough to follow me around, you've ruffled my feathers. But I'd swear something was wrong if you t'weren't.

BUFORD

Darlin', while you're out, I ordered five pounds of chub. Can you pick it up? The big beaver roast is comin' up.

BEULAH

It's not a gossip rag, and... yes, Buford. I'll be happy as a hornet to fetch your meat.

TOMMY

Eew.

BEULAH

Take out the trash, Tommy!

BUFORD

I checked Dooley's and Whitaker's Hardware—sold out. I'll see if anyone's got a portable or a window unit we can barrie (borrow).

BEULAH

Lovely! I don't want the reporter and photographer to suffer.

SHOCKINGLY, THELSIE MAE JENKINS appears at the screen door. She is well-dressed, scarf over her hair, big dramatic sunglasses—an old friend of BEULAH and BUFORD from high school.

THELSIE

Beulah honey?! Beulah!!

BUFORD

Jeremiah jumped up. Speak of the devil and she shall appear!

THELSIE

Oh, you're real funny. (LOUDLY and DRAMATICALLY) Beulah Hortense Bumpinpickles! Are you there, sweet darlin'?! Oh my... Have you seen outside?!

BUFORD

Thelsie Mae Jenkins! Get in here before you scare the chickens.

BEULAH

I haven't been outside yet! Why!?

THELSIE

Hi Tommy. Hello Buford.

TOMMY

What's goin' on?

BUFORD

Is there a fire or somethin'?

THELSIE

(Smartassed, in one breath)
I'd be screamin' "FIRE! FIRE! Someone get a hose, there's a fire! Dear God Almighty, hear me now and send a flood, there's a fire!" if there was a fire, Buford! What do you think I am, a simpleton?!

BUFORD

Well, the way you carry on sometimes... I'd think you were possessed.

THELSIE

As a good Christian woman, I'll pretend I didn't hear that.

BUFORD

As long as we're pretendin' you're actually a christian woman, sure...

THELSIE

Sweet-dear-lord-baby-Jesus-in-a-manger! I just can't believe it! The horror! The terror! The unmitigated gaul!

BEULAH

The unmitigated who?!

BUFORD

Lord help us... C'mon Tommy, let's see what all the holy dramatics are about before she works herself into a stroke.

BEULAH

Should I be worried? Do we need the shot gun?! Be careful, you two!

BUFORD and TOMMY exit. THELSIE sets down her bag, pulls out a martini glass and shaker, and pours a martini.

BEULAH

Now, what the heck is it? What's going on, Thelsie Mae?!

THELSIE

(Fanning herself)
Oh my goodness! It's a furnace in here! Hotter than a-

BEULAH

The AC's thawin'! You were sayin'?

THELSIE

Well, I was walkin' up your driveway, lookin' cute in my little outfit and Chanel bag, singing Jolene pitch-perfectly with my AirPods in-you know, APPLE-I looked over at your flower garden and-I just could not believe my own delicate little eyeballs!

BEULAH

Pitch-perfectly?! Sure... Now out with it, woman!

BUFORD returns.

BUFORD

Darlin', it's not lookin' good out there.

BEULAH

You're scaring me... Did a fox get in the hen house?!

BUFORD

Well, honey, it looks as though—

THELSIE

Excuse me!? But I—got—this!

(approaching BEULAH,
after a moment to
collect herself)

I know how much it means to you. I would rather ram my youthful, ageless face into a red brick wall than ever cause you any hurt or distress, especially over something you loved so dearly.

TOMMY runs back in. THELSIE pulls out a toothpick with 3 olives wrapped in a napkin, plunks it into her martini.

THELSIE

But here I am! where the good Lord sent me in this time of crisis. Where I was called to be. Serendipitous, I suppose.

BEULAH

I thought serendipitous implied something positive!

THELSIE

I guess it's all in how you look at it really.

BUFORD

Your begonias, honey!

TOMMY

Your prized petunias!

BEULAH

Oh, please don't say it—

THELSIE

Your viny clematis!

TOMMY

Your—

BEULAH

Pussy willow?!

THELSIE

Yes! Someone has defiled your precious, precious garden!

BEULAH

Defiled?!

BEULAH runs out the door. THELSIE continues yelling after her.

THELSIE

(out to the audience, sloshing her martini) Just like I said—DEFILED! MARRED! DEBASED! SULLIED! Clean out your ears, woman! Why, sweet Lord above, why do this to a poor, *simple* woman?! I would rather have stabbed out my eyeballs with salad forks than witness such an atrocity visited upon someone with such a *delicate, simple mind*!! I know how much your garden meant to you!

BEULAH

But—it's going to be featured in the Beaverton Gazette! MY FLOWER GARDEN?! Someone destroyed my flower garden?! But, why?!

TOMMY and BUFORD tend to BEULAH, fanning her. THELSIE looks on, relishing the moment, almost impossible to contain her joy.

THELSIE

Just such a tragedy! Who would do this! Awful, terrible... embarrassing. My goodness, and to such a "*spectacle*" of a woman. And she's gonna be in the Gazette... Poo. I'm sure you don't...didn't want... this getting out just yet, but.. ya know, it's gonna git out somehow. Might as well come from someone who cares so intimately. (sotto, sending text) Send. (Drinks martini.)

BEULAH

My garden?! Destroyed? Who would do such a TERRIBLE thing?!

THELSIE

Thugs? Vagrants? A *demented florist*? Who knows?!

TOMMY

This is better than any TV show I've ever seen.

BUFORD

Son, this ain't no laughing matter!

THELSIE relishes the chaos as lights fade.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT I — SCENE II

LIGHTS UP on TOMMY and AUNT BLANCHE. She grips a controller, intensely focused. The room vibrates with the chaos of their video game: machine guns rattle, police sirens wail, explosions echo. A couple of small fans spin lazily, streamers flutter dramatically in their breeze, as if caught in the game's mayhem.

BLANCHE

Take that, you son of a—!

TOMMY

Now run out in front of that red car! See it, that one!

AUNT BLANCHE

How do I punch out the driver window?!

TOMMY

Press the triangle! The triangle!

AUNT BLANCHE

Get out of my Lamborghini! Ha ha! I threw him down on his FACE. That's what you get! You don't know who you're messin' with!

TOMMY

(Laughing) You don't have to keep punchin' him like that. Just get in!

AUNT BLANCHE

Can't help myself! I'm on fire!

TOMMY

Now, go! Go, go!

SOUNDS of tires peeling out, shooting, police sirens. AUNT BLANCHE makes yelps, hoo-hahs, and excited noises while playing.

TOMMY

Hit the gas!

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh my goodness, I just ran over a streetwalker! I didn't mean to steal her money... I feel so bad. NOT!

BEULAH OFFSTAGE

Tommy! Brie's here!

TOMMY

Ok, momma. Tell her I'm in here! (To AUNT BLANCHE) Now turn right!

BEULAH enters with BRIE, a girl around TOMMY's age, one of his good friends. BRIE carries a paper bag from her family's bait and tackle shop, holding it like it's radioactive.

BRIE

(grimacing) I swear, Miss Beulah, somethin' in here just blinked at me.

BEULAH

Oh, that's just the crickets, sugar. They're friendly.

BRIE

Friendly?! These are squirmy, crunchy little nightmares with too many legs!

BEULAH

(taking them from her, putting them in the fridge) Buford said he needed 'em quick, so thank you. Why look at you, you sweet thang! You act like you ain't never touched bait before!

BRIE

I know we own the shop, Miss Beulah. Doesn't mean I touch the merchandise. My job's customer service--smile, bag it up, and ignore the fact that this stuff belongs in a horror movie!

They notice AUNT BLANCHE and TOMMY playing.

BEULAH

Oh, sweet Delilah! What's going on? Is all THAT... violence necessary?

BRIE

Whatcha all doin'? Whoa! It's hot in here! Is that Grand Theft Auto?

TOMMY

Yep.

AUNT BLANCHE

Hi Brie! Is that a helicopter?! Oh, there's two of 'em...
THREE now! OOH, I'M A BaaaaaD BAD GIRL! Where's my torpedo
launcher...

BRIE

You got the SWAT after ya!

TOMMY

Four stars! Hit the gas and jump the ramp! See that ramp?!

AUNT BLANCHE

Yep! Here I go!!

BRIE

Dang! Go Aunt Blanche! Go, go, go!

ALL watch the screen as she ramps
her car, flies through the air,
burns and crashes. AUNT BLANCHE
laugh-screams.

AUNT BLANCHE

Oooh, yes! YOU—JUST—GOT—BLANCHE—I—FIED! Ha ha!

BEULAH

Oh my... is that blood?! WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HEAD?!

TOMMY

That-was-epic!!

BRIE

Dang! You're better at this than Tommy!

AUNT BLANCHE

Ooh wee, BEULAH, did you see my head shoot clean off when I
landed?!

BEULAH

That is just utterly disgustin'! And children play this?!

BRIE

I never knew watchin' Miss Blanche runnin' cocaine for the
Cartel would be such a good time!

BEULAH

A kilo of WHAT?!

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, ya ain't seen nothin' yet! And I ain't never had so much fun doin' so.

BEULAH has an obvious negative reaction.

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, relax, BEULAH. It's just pixels on a TV screen.

BEULAH

Pixels, huh? Those games are destroying our youth. Tommy, you are not a good influence on your great aunt.

TOMMY

You sure it ain't the other way around?

They LAUGH. BEULAH shakes her head.

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, lighten up, BEULAH. Whenever else in my life do you think I'd get the chance to do a cocaine run for the cartel? You sure didn't know me back in the seventies.

BEULAH

Well, I do know you "now," close to your seventies.

BRIE

I bet you were a hip chick.

AUNT BLANCHE

I was a hip somethin'. Loved daisies. Used to wear 'em in my hair. Drove the boys crazy! Rawr!

BEULAH

Well, I guess you learn somethin' new every day. You mean to tell me you and... cocaine...?

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, of course not, Beulah... not until the 80s. (BEULAH stares) I'm jestin'. But (playfully girling with a BRIE) I did know how to let my hair down from time to time. Daisies and all. Had a bit of a reputation!

BEULAH

You didn't necessarily answer my question.

AUNT BLANCHE

Not that kind of reputation. Just believed we gals had the same right to a fun time. That's all.

BRIE

Damn right.

TOMMY

Did you let your freak flag fly?

AUNT BLANCHE

High and proud! It flew so high, it's probably still stuck in the clouds somewhere over the Mississippi! (Laughs big)

BEULAH

I don't even want to know.

BRIE

I bet you were popular! I just love your laugh, Aunt Blanche—it's infectious.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, ain't you just a darlin' yourself.

BRIE

I've really enjoyed getting to know you lovely people.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, there ain't a better family than yours that coulda' taken over the bait and tackle shop. I like the new name!

BRIE

Well, we wanted something that showed support to the town.

BEULAH

Fuzzy Beaver? Look, y'all, I don't want to interrupt your good time here, but the sheriff's heading over. I need a hand—the Continental's gotta go in the garage, and—

AUNT BLANCHE

I'll do it!

BEULAH

I don't think so. (Motioning to the TV screen) I think I've seen enough of you and "cars" for one day.

TOMMY

You got the keys?

BEULAH

Hangin' by the backdoor, son.

TOMMY heads out.

BRIE

Is there anything I can help you with, Mrs. Beulah?

BEULAH

Well... I had bread to bake, radishes to slice, cheese to cut... but with the new development, I don't know.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, they're not doing a story on your culinary skills, Beulah, unless burnt toast is back in fashion.

BEULAH sighs. BLANCHE realizes her social whoopsie.

AUNT BLANCHE CONT'D

Oh, Beulah, I am just so sorry about your garden. I probably shouldn't be sittin' here whoopin' it up while you're goin' through this, you sweet thing. It just don't feel right. Where are my manners?

BEULAH

Aunt Blanche, you know I ain't like that.

AUNT BLANCHE

Mother would've told me it was in bad form. I can hear her now—"Young lady, mind your tongue. You weren't raised in a barn, just next to one."

BEULAH

God rest her soul.

AUNT BLANCHE

And with you getting in the Beaverton Gazette and all... just a GD shame.

BRIE

I don't mean to pry, but... do you have any idea who might've done it?

BEULAH

Honestly, I just... I don't know. This town ain't no bigger than a minute.

AUNT BLANCHE

--and half of it's the Piggly Wiggly parking lot! (beat) Are you thinkin' it could be... oh, I don't know... Thelsie Mae?

BRIE

Oh, really?! Someone you know?!

They share a knowing look.

BEULAH

I don't wanna point fingers, but... (leans in slightly) let's just say she's got a history of pokin' her nose--and her weed killer--where it don't belong.

AUNT BLANCHE

Mm-hmm. She's been jealous ever since you won "Best Blooms" three years in a row.

BEULAH

Well, I called to tell the reporter to cancel, but now apparently it's gonna be a "different" story.

AUNT BLANCHE

If it's any consolation, honey, it'll be the most-read story in Beaverton. You know how folks around here LOVE the drama.

BRIE

If there is anything I can do, please let me know.

BEULAH

You're a doll. (beat, joking) Don't happen to know anybody with an extra window unit, do ya? Every store's sold out!

BRIE

You said the sheriff's comin' over. He seems to know everybody—maybe ask him?

AUNT BLANCHE

Ha! The sheriff? Only thing he's good at liftin' is a donut. That man's about as useful as tits on a bull.

BEULAH

Unfortunately, he's all we got, Aunt Blanche.

AUNT BLANCHE

You got the *unfortunate* part right. Might as well called a fat, wet rock.

BEULAH

Aunt Blanche!

AUNT BLANCHE

Whut?!

BRIE

You're too funny, Miss Blanche! What?! Is he ill-equipped to do his job?

AUNT BLANCHE

Let's just say he's "ill-equipped," period. And talk about a Chatty Cathy—he could talk the legs off a chair!

BRIE

Oh, I know! He stopped by the shop last week and talked so long, I watched my daddy's soul leave his body.

BEULAH

I'd rather drink bleach than sit through another one of his stories.

AUNT BLANCHE

(laughs)(Tries to change subject) How's business over at the bait and tackle, anyway?

BRIE

Busy! Lotta folks around here love to hunt and fish.

AUNT BLANCHE

They sure do. Before y'all bought it, it was hardly ever open.

BEULAH

Buford had to dig for his own worms and catch his own crickets.

AUNT BLANCHE

(to BRIE) Well, you are just the sweetest thing.

BEULAH

You really are. Tommy's a lucky guy. (A wink) He needed someone like you.

AUNT BLANCHE shifts the focus to
BEULAH.

AUNT BLANCHE

You know, I was thinkin'—you had any awkward moments with anyone lately?

BEULAH

No. Not that I can think of.

AUNT BLANCHE

Be honest, Beulah. You cut someone off in the Lincoln again? You drive like turn signals are suggestions. Or maybe you jumped the line at the Piggly Wiggly? Folks 'round here hold grudges tighter than Tupperware lids.

BEULAH

No, Aunt Blanche. You know me—I try to treat folks how I wanna be treated.

BRIE

Y'all mentioned "Thelsie Mae"—oh, wait a minute... isn't she that human tabloid?

AUNT BLANCHE

I like this one, Beulah. She's sassy. (beat) Hm... what about Thelsie?

BEULAH

We've had our spats, but now it's just good old-fashioned sassin'.

BRIE

Sassin'?

BEULAH

Small town foolishness.

AUNT BLANCHE

Buford went to prom with Thelsie Mae.

BRIE

Why didn't you go with him?

BEULAH

You know that boy of mine you hang out with? (pats stomach)

BRIE

(thinking, then realizing) Ohhh...

BEULAH

Prom was the least of my worries. And Buford? Well, Mama and Daddy had words for him--none of 'em nice.

BRIE

Did Thelsie Mae know *why* you couldn't go?

BEULAH

Lord, no! Nobody knew. Well--Buford knew, and Blanche knew--but that was it. You couldn't be in the family way unless you were married, and I sure wasn't tellin' Thelsie or Snackcake. One peep to them and the whole county would've known before I even started showin'.

BRIE

Why not tell them now?

BEULAH

You're sweet, but it's complicated. Everybody still thinks I got pregnant *after* we got married. Old-fashioned or not, that mattered back then.

BRIE

But they had to have known!

BEULAH

Maybe. But havin' a hunch and knowing for sure are two different things. Long as it stayed gossip, I could play dumb and keep my halo. I'm sure someone could have done the math.

AUNT BLANCHE

In a small Southern town, you pick your battles like you pick your seat at church--carefully, so you don't end up in the line of fire.

BRIE looks puzzled but accepts it.

SNACKCAKE (offstage)

Beulah?!

BEULAH

Oh sweet petunias. I can handle anything but her right now.

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, but ain't she one of your closest friends?

BEULAH

Don't get me wrong—she means well. (then, whispering fast)
But I just don't feel like talkin'. Hate tellin' the same
story over and over. News spreads faster than gossip at a
hair salon—especially if Snackcake hears it!

AUNT BLANCHE chuckles. SNACKCAKE
bursts in through the screen door
like a category five hurricane.

SNACKCAKE

Beulah, sweet angel, are you here?!

(yelling offstage))

Bobby Dwayne! Watch your sister! Don't give me that look!
I'll blister your bottom!

(back to Beulah))

Am I interruptin' anything, darlin'?

BEULAH

Don't let 'em near the garden—it's a crime scene.

SNACKCAKE

And stay away from that trashy garden! (quickly,
backpedaling) I meant—what happened to it made it look
trashy, not you, Beulah! I can't believe someone had the
gaul and audasiffie (audacity) to molest your garden!

BRIE

The what?

AUNT BLANCHE and BEULAH share a
look: "Don't ask."

SNACKCAKE (YELLING OFFSTAGE)

Bobby Dwayne! I'm watchin' you! (back to Beulah, whispering)
Thelsie Mae texted me earlier...

BEULAH

I'm sure she couldn't wait.

SNACKCAKE

It's hotter than pearls in a pawn shop in here! I brought you a bundt cake—might wanna set it under a fan or the icin'll melt.

BEULAH

Thanks, hon. The A/C's out again. I'll stick it in the fridge.

SNACKCAKE

Pumpkin, when did it happen?

BEULAH

It froze up this mornin'.

SNACKCAKE

No, honey--the garden.

BEULAH

Oh, Middle of the night, I guess.

SNACKCAKE

(squints) It's a hit job. Someone's been probably been stakin' out the joint for months. Politics—plain and simple.

BEULAH

You watch too much Investigation Discovery.

SNACKCAKE

I know these things! (to Brie) I'm clare-Bouyant. It's a gift sent from God.

BRIE

Don't you mean clairvoyant?

SNACKCAKE

Brie, is it? Not my favorite cheese, but cute name.

AUNT BLANCHE

Careful, Brie. She'll be readin' your "fortune" before you can blink. Don't give her any money.

SNACKCAKE

Oh hush. It's called psycho-kinetic, or somethin'. I hear voices, ya know, like angels lettin' me in on secrets for the greater good of mankind. Or at least Beaverton County.

AUNT BLANCHE

I think its called schizophrenia?

BRIE bursts out laughing, then stops herself.

SNACKCAKE

You're silly, Aunt Blanche. (beat) Anyway, couple years back, I was takin' a patchwork pillow class down at Laverne's Fabrics and Auto Body—

AUNT BLANCHE

Auto Body?!

SNACKCAKE

You know... they like to diversify! Anyway, last day of class, Sadie Wilkins goes to grab her little green apple, patchwork pillow, and--get this--someone had viciously snipped off every corner of it! Threads hangin' ever which way. A trajesty to behold.

AUNT BLANCHE

I can already tell this is goin' somewhere ridiculous.

SNACKCAKE

The woman had just been through hell. Her and her husband had just been on Jerry Springer. He had just left her for a--get this--bisexual-twerkaholic-conjoined-twin stripper!

BRIE

What was the episode called?

SNACKCAKE

"My Husband Left Me for a Bisexual Twerkaholic Conjoined Twin Stripper."

BEULAH

Lord, I reckon that'd be like watchin' a malfunctioning ceiling fan.

SNACKCAKE

Two heads, one body--it was confusing to my delicate nature.

A LOUD CRASH offstage.

SNACKCAKE (YELLING)

Bobby Dwayne! If somethin' falls on you, don't come cryin' to me! Anyway--Sadie wailed like a baboon mother losin' her baboon baby.

BEULAH

Was she upset about her husband or the pillow?

SNACKCAKE

Both! I guess... But the straw-hat that broke the camel was that pillow incident.

Another CRASH.

SNACKCAKE (CLAPPING)

Be civil out there!

AUNT BLANCHE

I'm just surprised she made it through pillow class considerin'—you know—two heads twerkin'. (beat) Oh Lord, I just got a visual.

BEULAH

Snackcake?!

SNACKCAKE

Whut?!

BEULAH

What does any of this have to do with you bein' clairvoyant?

SNACKCAKE

Well, I had a dream-vision a few weeks before it happened. (to Brie I'm like a younger, hotter Sylvia Browne.

AUNT BLANCHE

That's it? That's your proof?

SNACKCAKE

You don't think she was hot?

AUNT BLANCHE

Dear Lord—about the husband leaving!

SNACKCAKE

Oh! Well, yes. And maybe I'll dream-vision 'bout whoever did this to Beulah next. I have the gift, you know.

AUNT BLANCHE

Can you also predict when you'll get better at it?

SNACKCAKE

Aunt Blanche! That wasn't very nice!

AUNT BLANCHE

I never claimed not to be.

AUNT BLANCHE purposefully said that to confuse, and smiles. SNACKCAKE looks confused.

SNACKCAKE

(Suddenly stops, gasps, waving arms) Hold on... oh my stars... I'm havin' one—this - very - second! Stand back.

AUNT BLANCHE

A stroke?!

BEULAH and AUNT BLANCHE roll their eyes; BRIE is transfixed. SNACKCAKE clutches a crystal hanging around her neck.

SNACKCAKE

No, no! Not a stroke, darlin'—a vision! (points dramatically into the air) I see... a big man--a big bumblin' ogre of a man--mirrors for eyes, chest like a gorilla--carryin' someone smaller--a tender little soul... It's like a David and Goliath!

(Pauses, squints, whispering)

And... the little one... dressed like an Eagle Scout?! DAVID AND GOLIATH! I can see it!

(snaps fingers, pointing)

Yes! Right here! And now... oh my heavens—Is that a marching band of raccoons? A flock of rogue llamas? A beaver apocalypse?!

(squints harder)

Is that Aunt Edna **on a unicycle**?!

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, dear Lord.

SNACKCAKE

(to no one) Aunt Edna! Tell Grandma I said hi!

AUNT BLANCHE

What is that you're holdin'?

SNACKCAKE

It's my sacred RUNE—(she pronounces it "roo-in").

BRIE

I think that's pronounced rune.

SNACKCAKE

A benevolent stone passed down through generations of my family. Many don't know this, but one of my ancestors was an unknown fourth wise man at the Nativity—it was said that he touched this very stone to the pinky toe of baby Jesus himself, in his little golden diaper.

BEULAH and AUNT BLANCHE exchange exhausted looks. BRIE tries not to laugh.

SNACKCAKE

Or... that's what I was told.

BEULAH

Well, whoever tore up my garden just stole my chance at bein' in the Beaverton Gazette. Now I'll be famous 'round here for somethin' else entirely.

SNACKCAKE

Politics, plain and simple. But you know what they say—bad publicity's still publicity.

BEULAH

I'm not a Kardashian, Snackcake. This ain't Keeping Up with the Bumpinpickles-es.

Beat.

AUNT BLANCHE

I've always wanted to ask—why do they call you Snackcake?

SNACKCAKE

Because I'm so sweet! (grins) I'm jokin'. Funny story, though—

BEULAH

Oh, please. Not now.

SNACKCAKE

I'll be quick!

BEULAH

Oh, dear Lord.

SNACKCAKE

See, my momma had a difficult pregnancy. Doctors practically tied her to the bed for two months—said I might be meetin' the Lord before I even got here—

A LOUD METAL CRASH offstage.

BEULAH

(Looking outside) Snackcake, your boy's climbin' up the side of the shed. Brie, honey, will you go "help" Tommy? (under her breath) And keep an eye out?

BRIE

Of course.

BEULAH

You're a dear.

BRIE exits. SNACKCAKE rushes to the door and yells out:

SNACKCAKE

Bobby Dwayne! Get your butt down now! And take that diaper off your head and put it back on your sister!

BEULAH

(to AUNT BLANCHE) Never a dull moment.

SNACKCAKE

Anyway, where was I?

AUNT BLANCHE

Your momma was tied to a bed.

SNACKCAKE

Right! So Daddy was makin' her scrambled eggs with pickles and jowl-a-penias when she hollered, "Caaarl Deeeean!"

AUNT BLANCHE

Was she in labor?

SNACKCAKE

Maybe. Daddy, bein' the **absolute** gentleman he is, threw her in the back of that '65 Chevy pick up, and sped off to Beaverton General—

BEULAH

(Looking out) Snackcake, Bobby Dwayne's got Amber Dawn in the trash can again. With the lid on.

SNACKCAKE

Oh, they're fine. (yelling) Hose her off! No—the side of the house, not the gutter! Thank you, Colby! And don't dig through Miss Beulah's thrown away mail, that's trashy!

BEULAH

Trashcan's filthy, she might can't breathe, you know.

SNACKCAKE

Oh, their fine. Kids bein' kids. Builds character.

TOMMY enters, winded.

TOMMY

Bobby Dwayne's gettin' big.

SNACKCAKE

Ain't he though? (flirty)

AUNT BLANCHE

(sharply) The story?

SNACKCAKE

Right! Long story short—

BEULAH

Too late.

SNACKCAKE

Daddy said when he saw me in the NICU, I wasn't no bigger than the Little Debbie Snackcake in his hand. So he called me Snackcake. And it stuck!

Silence. Everyone stares.

AUNT BLANCHE

That's it?

SNACKCAKE

Ain't it sweet?

AUNT BLANCHE

(under her breath) I'll never get that five minutes back.

SOUND of a car engine roaring to life. BRIE rushes in, panicked.

BRIE

Miss Snackcake! Bobby Dwayne's backin' your New Yorker out the driveway like it's a getaway car!

SNACKCAKE bolts to the door. TOMMY follows.

SNACKCAKE

My keys! Bobby Dwayne! Stop right now! PUT IT IN PARK! Oh Lord—he's got the baby workin' the pedals!
(snarls) BOBBY DWAYNE!

SNACKCAKE runs out. The sound of screeching tires.

BRIE

I'm so sorry! He tricked us! I don't even know where he got smoke bombs from—one second I'm looking at the garden, the next...And before I can blink, the doors are locked, he's revving the engine, and...

BEULAH

Oh, it's alright hon. This ain't the first time.

AUNT BLANCHE

Never a dull moment around here, I'll tell you that!

You hear the SOUND of TIRES
SCREECHING.

They watch out the window.

BEULAH
Ooop! He's tearin' off down the driveway, y'all!

AUNT BLANCHE
I would rather sew my lips together than to speak ill of
someone's child, but that boy ain't right in the head.

BEULAH
Neither is Snackcake. But she's good people. Oh my,
Snackcake just jumped on the hood, and looks like Tommy's
got the door open.

BRIE
She got him out?

BEULAH
Well, looks like the baby slammed on the brakes and
Snackcake did quite a masterful summersault off the hood.
Oop. Now she's chasin' him with the hose.

AUNT BLANCHE
Oh dear Lord. I can't watch.

BEULAH
Oh, she's running. Oh she fell. Oop, she's up. Well, she's
got him.

AUNT BLANCHE
Well, thank God for that. If anyone can handle him, it's
her. Though have you ever noticed how far apart that child's
eyes are?

BEULAH
Me and Tommy were just talking about that earlier.

BRIE squints, as to look hard.

BRIE
Kinda like an ostrich.

They all look at each other and
laugh.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT I - SCENE II & 1/2

Lights off. The house seems empty. Enter DELBERT HOTCHKISS, peeking around outside of the house, you see him through the windows and door, crouching low like a cartoon spy, glancing over his shoulder constantly.

DELBERT

Hello?! Anyone home? I come in peace... mostly.

He tiptoes to the back door, freezes, crouches, peers through the window. Nose touches glass. Whispers to himself.

DELBERT CONT'D

Okay... okay... calm... deep breaths... it's just a window.

Spots a pie on the counter. His eyes go wide. He slowly circles it like a predator.

DELBERT CONT'D

Is that... pie?! Oh, sweet mercy... pie... I like pie. Very much.

He crouches again, whispers as if the pie can hear him.

DELBERT CONT'D

Don't mind me... just an admirer from afar. I wonder if it's apple or cherry... (beat) or peach.

One last effort, knocks timidly, peeks around the like he's defusing a bomb.

DELBERT CONT'D

Hello? Anybody here?! I... I need to apologize for something!

He freezes, sniffing the air. Another look at the pie. Then he gives up, retreats as dramatically as he entered, muttering to himself.

DELBERT CONT'D

Okay... next time... next time...

Disappears. (Maybe leaves a small, odd clue—a handkerchief, a note, something?)

ACT I-SCENE III

THELSIE MAE'S & SNACKCAKE'S HOUSES shortly after. Lights go dark on MAIN STAGE. Light (or spotlight) come up on UPSTAGE RIGHT. DOWNSTAGE FLAT swings out, becoming a room in SNACKCAKE'S house. SNACKCAKE is on a house phone, she is folding laundry/ironing. PHONE RINGS. Light (or spotlight) come up on UPSTAGE LEFT. THELSIE MAE, DOWNSTAGE FLAT swings out, becoming a room in her home, martini in hand, lounging about, answers her phone.

THELSIE
(Doing an overly
offensive Latin
accent, holding a
Martini)

Hello! Zis is ze maid. Can I help you?

SNACKCAKE
(Rolling her eyes,
muttering to
herself)

Are you serious?

THELSIE
I, uh, have precious moment figurines and rare mint julep cups zat need dusted.

SNACKCAKE
Can I speak to Thelsie-Mae?

THELSIE
(Feigning checking
her "schedule")
She may still be in a meeting with... "Southern Living"
magazine-people. Please hold.

THELSIE holds a phone to her chest,
takes a sip of her Martini, smirks.

THELSIE CONT'D
(changing to her
real voice)
Hello? This is Mrs. Jenkins-

SNACKCAKE
That was beyond offensive.

THELSIE
Was Consuela pleasant when she answered? I hope she was.
You know, good help is so hard to find.

SNACKCAKE
(Under her breath)
She even made up a name.

THELSIE
What was that, hon? Anyway, watcha' want? (sipping martini)
I'm busy.

SNACKCAKE
Oh, ok. Well, I just dropped the kids off at Mom's, and-

THELSIE
That poor woman.

SNACKCAKE
What was that?

THELSIE
I said... "fun... how fun for her."

SNACKCAKE
Right... anyway, did you do it?

THELSIE
Do what, darlin'?

SNACKCAKE
You know... Beulah's garden?

THELSIE
(Feigning innocence)
Me? Oh heavens, no! If you could only see these delicate
arms—these gorgeously sculpted nails... wouldn't they be
covered in filth?

SNACKCAKE
You could have had someone else do it.

THELSIE
Why I'd rather be chewed on by rabid dogs than hurt someone
I care for.

SNACKCAKE

Bull-hockey. I know you've harbored ill will since prom.

THELSIE

(Voice rises,
dramatic)

I have no idea what you're insinuatn'.

SNACKCAKE

You know exactly what I'm "sin-inu-ate-in'."

THELSIE

Oh, you mean the night that trollipin' hussy showed up at prom and took Buford... leaving me solo!

SNACKCAKE

Buford always liked Beulah. It was "sharon-dip-olous" that they were together.

THELSIE

Don't you mean serendipitious? And I did not "like" Buford. I was fine goin' solo. That was my original intention, I just wanted to support the BOTH of them. No one seems to remember THAT.

SNACKCAKE

Whatever.

THELSIE

I have NEVER forgiven that wolfed-up gutter-snipe for makin' me look like a fool in front of our whole class. The WHOLE CLASS!

The sweet act drops, her voice
rising, full of bitterness.

THELSIE CONT'D

It was always, "Beulah, Beulah, Beulah!" Oh, did you hear? "Beulah was made head cheerleader! She could kick higher and wider than anybody else!" Knowing full well when she tried out, she wasn't wearin' a lick of underwear! Or, "Sorry, Thelsie, but we cast Beulah as Dolly Levi in this year's Beaverton Spring Musical. You want to understudy her? Her bust fills out the costume just beautifully! Oh, and her voice—oh, the voice of an angel!" My foot! If you call that SCREECHING' she did singing! "But oh, don't you worry, Thelsie, "There's always next year!" Or--

SNACKCAKE

Thelsie-

THELSIE

--"Have you seen how smooth and buttery Beulah's cheeks are, not a blemish one! Maybe you should ask what Avon products SHE uses! You know her momma sells it!"

SNACKCAKE

(Interrupting, flustered)
Thelsie!

THELSIE

She needed more than Avon I'll tell ya that. I WAS Dolly Levi! I was charming, brassy, high spirited-

SNACKCAKE

-and a meddler in other's lives-

THELSIE

(big and dramatic) Well... that's the pot callin' the kettle black!

THELSIE begins to shake her another martini.

SNACKCAKE

And let's be real-it was written in the stars that Beulah and Buford were meant to be together. You only went to prom with him because Beulah couldn't make it at the last minute--ARE you shaking yourself a cocktail?! It's not even noon!

THELSIE abruptly stops.

THELSIE

(.) ...No.

SNACKCAKE

You're such a liar!

THELSIE

YOU are.

SNACKCAKE

Anyway, put the Buford--Beulah thing to rest. He wasn't into you.

THELSIE

Are you dense? Ever heard of the Bechdel Test?

SNACKCAKE

Oh, yeah! I think I tested negative... was that whenever everyone got crabs?

THELSIE

Crabs?! What—

SNACKCAKE

(sputters, claps hand over mouth) Oh, honey, not literally! Just... high school stuff. Anyway, go on.

THELSIE

It's about women's stories always revolving around a damn man. I DIDN'T LIKE BUFORD! For the umpteen millionth time...

SNACKCAKE

(blankly) Huh?!

THELSIE

Never mind... Look, I'll admit this--my delicate little heart is still bruised and battered from being left high and dry at prom, but I swear on my precious housekeeper's life--

SNACKCAKE

Oh, that's rich—

THELSIE

--that I had nothing to do with her garden's demise. Now that said... I did secretly enjoy a tiny bit of schadenfreude.

SNACKCAKE

Huh?!

THELSIE rolls eyes. Awkward beat.

SNACKCAKE CONT'D

Oh, someone at the Piggly Wiggly cursed Beulah out.

THELSIE

(sharply) What!?

SNACKCAKE

Mmhmm. Yes ma'am. Said she stole a parking spot--cussed her up one side and down the other. You should've seen it!

THELSIE

Oh no they didn't.

SNACKCAKE

Oh, they sure did.

THELSIE

They better be glad I wasn't there. No one speaks to us like--

SNACKCAKE

Aha! Listen to you!

THELSIE

Whut?! (pauses, realizing)

SNACKCAKE

You sound like a mama bear with lipstick.

THELSIE

Whatever. Shut up, Snackcake.

SNACKCAKE

(teasing, sing-song) You lo-ove Beu-lah! Don't even try to deny it! You'd give her the shirt off *my* back.

THELSIE

I had a moment. You tricked me.

SNACKCAKE

(playful shrug) Divine intra-vengeance. And besides, I guess I ain't had a dream-vision yet that showed you doing it.

THELSIE

Still with that? You're about as psychic as my left foot.

SNACKCAKE

Better pull that left hoof outta that tasteless feathered mule pump you call a shoe and read the tea leaves, honey!

THELSIE

My shoes are tasteful and elegant.

SNACKCAKE

Tasteful? They're hideous. Just ask any drag queen.

THELSIE

Aak! If I wanted abuse, I'd call my mother-in-law.

SNACKCAKE

If it tweren't not you, then who?

THELSIE

"You mean 'twasn't' and 'who.' And drop the 'not.'"

SNACKCAKE

Whut?

THELSIE

You said " tweren't not." First of all "tweren't" is already contracting "twere and not" so saying "not" again is like you said "twere not not."

SNACKCAKE

Huh?

THELSIE

It's a double negative.

SNACKCAKE

Double what now?

THELSIE

A double-Never mind, forget it.

SNACKCAKE

Ir-regardless, I ain't trying to be "gram-erical." You tryin' throw me off the scent?

THELSIE

Not hard to do. You're not the dumbest person in the world, but let's hope they don't die anytime soon.

SNACKCAKE

(Laughing) Take that back, you heifer!

THELSIE

I will not. I'll take it back when you stop accusing me of thangs I did not do!

SNACKCAKE

Now you're just bein' wicked. But you know I love ya.

Beat.

THELSIE

I think Tommy did it.

SNACKCAKE

What? Really?! Get outta here.

THELSIE

Yes ma'am. Have you seen how artistic that boy is?

SNACKCAKE

What does that have to do with it?

THELSIE

He's either trying to get Beulah's attention, or get back at her for ignoring his talents. She should have cultivated him, not that dumb garden.

SNACKCAKE

Listen to you! Caring about somebody other than yourself... phil-ossa-fickle and flowery of you, I'd say.

THELSIE

Philosophical?! And yes, I speak flowery. It's in my blood. Just like all y'all. Just like YOU, and all the women of

Beaverton Proper, past, present, and future. Don't act like you don't.

SNACKCAKE

Oh, I am not like that.

THELSIE

My ass you're not.

SNACKCAKE

Look at the time. I've got better things to do than listen to your nonsense.

THELSIE

You CALLED me. Did I strike a chord? Pluck the emotional banjo?

SNACKCAKE

Shut up, weirdo.

THELSIE

You shut up.

SNACKCAKE

No, you shut up!

THELSIE

Make me.

SNACKCAKE

You're such a child.

THELSIE

You are.

SNACKCAKE

(Inspirationally) All I know is, we should be getting to the bottom of this. We are the closest thing that we have to being true family. This is a grave injustice that has been done upon one of our sisters and we must fight, tooth and nail. Our bonds are sacred. We are family, if not by blood, by clan, and to ensure that these bonds are not broken, we must always unite!

THELSIE

The queen of Sheba SPEAKS! Go on girl!

SNACKCAKE

And if Tommy is responsible for this, like you're sayin'... I think it just is... such an ugly situation. (beat) I'll have to consult the mystical powers that be. And that's all I have to say about that.

THELSIE

(she starts to laugh) What the hell was that?

SNACKCAKE

I know, right? I shocked myself! I about fell over listenin' to my own lips flappin'!

THELSIE

Well, Blanche Dubois, if that ain't the most high-falootin', over-the-top spiel I've ever heard.

SNACKCAKE

Shut up.

THELSIE

Admit it. You know it's true.

SNACKCAKE

I will admit to nothin'.

THELSIE

"this is a grave injustice" and "we must unite!"

SNACKCAKE

Ok. It's true. I'm flowery too. You happy?

THELSIE

(laughing) As happy as an warm apple pie, fresh out of the oven, coolin' on the windowsill, on the fourth of July!

SNACKCAKE

Oh, that's original.

They laugh.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT II - SCENE 1

BEAULAH'S HOME

Lights come up on BEULAH, BUFORD, and SHERIFF. BEULAH is arranging a vase of many flowers from her garden, trying to save what she can. SHERIFF, wearing full uniform, including a bullet proof vest and mirrored sunglasses, is telling a story, over dramatically, from his old glory days.

SHERIFF

It was a hot, sticky day... like it is in here.

BEULAH

The AC's froze up.

SHERIFF

Oh. Anyway, there I am, confined to my desk... like a lady secretary.

BEULAH rolls her eyes, but smiles
and offers him a pastry and coffee.
He eats/drinks throughout, as well
as undresses somewhat.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Thank ya. Now, I gotta keep busy or I'll go crazier than a jackrabbit. I mean, it takes a lotta' effort to keep in this top form and physique you see before you.

Takes a bite of donut. Begins
loosening vest slowly, sweat
dripping, muttering to himself.

BEULAH

(Sarcastically,
oblivious to his
stripping)

Oh, I can see that.

BUFORD

Anyway, sheriff—

SHERIFF

Jimmy Joe Spunkmeister busts in, hollering and sweating bullets. I said, "Joe, what are you doin', actin' like a fool?" He's bawlin' about someone stealin' his Porkchop and Tater Tot.

BUFORD

Stealin' one tater tot? I'm partial to at least seven.

BEULAH

And extra crispy.

SHERIFF

Yeah, well... Porkchop was his prized pig, and Tater Tot his morning crowin' rooster. I couldn't fathom who'd steal a swine and a bird, but I hit the road to investigate, happier than a muskrat at a Hank Williams concert.

He loosens hat, then tie, then
slowly removes vest, muttering
about the heat.

SHERIFF

Sorry, it's just so hot.

BUFORD

Muskrats do like Hank Williams!

SHERIFF

My top suspect? Crazy Klepto Carl, the town troublemaker.
Found him at Big E's Tavern, bacon in his beard, chicken
wing in his hair. You know he ain't never been quite right.
His momma used to smack the side of his head when his
eyeball went all funny-'member that? But anyway, I digress.
(BEULAH eye roll) When asked, he spun some nonsense about
pork chops and chicken wings in an apple pie tin—in a walnut
tree!

BUFORD

So, you're positive it wasn't a pecan tree?

AUNT BLANCHE and TOMMY enter. AUNT
BLANCHE rolls her eyes VERY
noticeably.

SHERIFF

No... I mean yes... anyway, it gets even stranger.

BEULAH

(Sarcastic) Stranger?! No...

SHERIFF

I may have been born at night, but I was NOT born on a
Tuesday.

Pause. Everyone stares confused.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Hello, Miss Blanche. Thomas.

AUNT BLANCHE

(Bothered) Hubert.

BEULAH

Well, was it him? I'd like to discuss the crime at hand—

SHERIFF

Turns out... oh, Klepto Carl had some useful info. After hours
of questioning, and getting knee-deep in mud—and mistaking a
mulberry bush for a suspect—don't ask.

BEULAH

I wasn't goin' too, Sheriff—

SHERIFF

I finally found Porkchop and Tater Tot. Apparently, they'd decided to take a midnight stroll. Crazy Carl heard from one-legged Barbra, who had **hopped** over to Old Man Biler—

BEULAH and AUNT BLANCHE immediately
roll eyes at the bad joke.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

—who told her there was a ruckus at his trout ponds in the night, keeping his dogs barkin' and his wife awake. I sneaked up to find lil' Porkchop and Tater Tot splashing around, havin' a hootenanny of a time!

BUFORD

Isn't that just somethin'! A pig and rooster havin' a pool party?

BEULAH

Please don't egg him on.

AUNT BLANCHE

What on Earth did I walk into?

BEULAH

Sheriff was just fancyin' us a story before we... ahem... talk about the crime scene.

BUFORD

(feigning being enamored) Was it hard to catch 'em?

SHERIFF

Naw. They were ready to get back home. In fact, they hopped right into the patrol car... and with a rooster on my shoulder, pig in my lap, off we went. Hell, I even let Porkchop steer for a bit. Jimmy Joe got his pig and rooster back.

He loosens tie, unbuttons the top
of his shirt, and fidgets with his
hat as he talks, wiping sweat off
his forehead. Could add a playful
"sashaying" motion to exaggerate
the heat and ridiculousness.

BEULAH

Well, isn't that just fabulous. Now about my garden—

SHERIFF

If you remember, he was so thankful, that year he sponsored that float in the Beaver Nation parade to honor my heroic action!

AUNT BLANCHE

I remember that float. A giant pig made of chicken wire with pink tissue paper stuck all over it, your name real big on both sides. Everybody chantin' "Pig! Pig! Pig!"

The joke is lost on the SHERIFF.
The group giggles behind his back.

SHERIFF (ALMOST EMOTIONAL)

I sat atop that float, proud as punch, cruisin' down Main Street, wavin'. I swear it brought a tear to my eye.

TOMMY

I know—we were all cryin'. Not a dry eye in the house.

AUNT BLANCHE

Truly a moment to behold. *Burned* right into my memory.

SHERIFF

My daddy was so moved. I remember passin' by, him in his wheelchair, head down in his hands, sobbin' with pride. And momma... well, she just looked *stunned*.

AUNT BLANCHE

I'm sure she was quite *taken* by the moment.

BEULAH

Proud... maybe isn't the exact "sentiment" I'd chosen to describe it.

SHERIFF

God rest their gentle souls. Which is why, comin' off feelin' so good, I feel not so good about what I'm gonna say.

AUNT BLANCHE

Do you have a suspect? Like Snackcake's boy? Or a vagrant?

TOMMY

Thelsie Mae?

SHERIFF

No. No suspects. (Beat) I'm sorry, Beulah. I hate to say it, but there's not much I can do for you.

BUFORD

How so, Sheriff?!

BEULAH

Not much you can do?! You can find out who the hell did this to me!

SHERIFF

Well, there's no murder, no one was stabbed, axed, or bludgeoned—

AUNT BLANCHE

Must you be so graphic, Hubert?!

SHERIFF

No one was beaten, bruised, or injured—

BEULAH

Well, I feel plenty injured!

SHERIFF

It's just property damage. Vandalism. To a lady garden, if you will. And with all due respect, honey, my plate's full up.

He wipes sweat from his neck, takes
off his hat and vest, fanning
himself.

AUNT BLANCHE

With what, Hubert? Donuts?

SHERIFF

(Loosening tie, defensive) And I'm short on resources.

AUNT BLANCHE

Resources? You mean like a badge and a car?

BEULAH

You drove all the way out here to tell me you ain't gonna help?! You coulda called!

SHERIFF

Didn't want to seem like I didn't care. Wanted to show some support.

(Unbuttons top
button, tugs shirt
to catch a breeze)

And I'm not sayin'—

BEULAH

Support?! By tellin' long-winded stories about a pig and chicken?!

SHERIFF

Rooster.

BUFORD

Honey, does it matter—

SHERIFF

Now hold on, Beulah—

BEULAH

No! All that time yammerin' on about a rooster, and everyone callin' you a pig, and now I'm just supposed to shrug this off?

SHERIFF

(Utterly lost) Callin' me a pig? Whut?

AUNT BLANCHE

Beulah, say what's on your mind, honey.

BEULAH

It's just... it crushes my heart. Someone lashed out—at me! And knowin' *someone harbors such ill will*, and with somethin' that brought me so much joy is just... gone. (Beat) And instead of justice, I get excuses. Typical.

BUFORD

Beulah—

BEULAH

Don't, Buford. (turning away) Forget I even called Hubert.

BEULAH exits, upset.

BUFORD

She just needs a minute.

AUNT BLANCHE

Let her breathe, Buford.

TOMMY

I'll go check on her.

Exits after BEULAH.

SHERIFF

(Now sweating, shirt half-open, wiping his brow with a donut napkin)

Well, sheesh... must be her time of the month, huh?

(Chuckles, looking for backup)

Right, Buford?

AUNT BLANCHE loudly sighs, glaring

SHERIFF

What? Just a joke to lighten the mood.

BUFORD

I think that joke may have missed its callin'.

AUNT BLANCHE

Buford, why don't you go check on your wife.

BUFORD

Yup. That's my cue.(exits quickly)

AUNT BLANCHE

Lighten the mood? Hubert, you've got the social tact of a drunk armadillo.

SHERIFF

People are too sensitive these days—

AUNT BLANCHE

And some folks don't have the sense God gave a cucumber.

SHERIFF

I was just tryin' to be funny.

AUNT BLANCHE

I'm sure it would've killed in 1954.

SHERIFF

I didn't mean—

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, I know what you meant. You meant to brush her off. But she's more than somebody's "wife" with a "lady" garden. She's a whole person.

SHERIFF

It was just a joke. This is gettin' a bit over-dramatic if you ask me.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, no one asked you.(beat) Look, I'm used to it. I'm from a different time. But you reduced her to nothin' but a hormonal creature—then made a bad joke and blamed a natural bodily function.

SHERIFF

We've all dealt with disrespect from time to time. We're all like family 'round here.

AUNT BLANCHE

Hubert, maybe it's just that some of us just have learned to take those little jabs quietly, choosin' our battles—'cause you know what?

SHERIFF

Whut?

AUNT BLANCHE

It gets exhausting engaging with idiots. And honey, if you find this ain't a problem for you, maybe you need to personally double check the request submitted to God by your momma and daddy when they prayed for your delivery into this world, and make sure "idiot" wasn't checked on that damn form.

SHERIFF

That's a little harsh. I suppose I—

AUNT BLANCHE

Nope. Don't suppose. Do. Go find who vandalized her garden, or I'll make sure every church potluck in three counties knows you couldn't find a thief in a one-road town.

SHERIFF

(puts hat back on,
contrite)

I see how my remarks may've been... in poor taste. And I also see I might need to reevaluate this sitchee-ation.

AUNT BLANCHE

Good idea. Now chop chop.

SHERIFF

Yes ma'am.

(gathers things,
exits, defeated)

BEULAH

(re-enters quietly)

Thank you, Aunt Blanche.

AUNT BLANCHE

For what?

BEULAH

For puttin' that poor fool in his place. I know my "first world" problems ain't really bigger than a hill of beans when I think about it. You know what, I'm startin' to feel silly—it's just a flower garden.

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, no no no. You listen here. Every problem--big or small, serious or silly--deserves a place at the table. Don't worry--the account's big enough for all credit types.

BEULAH

Here I am goin' on about a garden when there's children starvin', people can't afford homes--

AUNT BLANCHE

Don't ever feel like your problems don't matter. Standin' up for yourself shows others how to do it too. Strength spreads. Don't forget that.

BEULAH

You're right. Strength does spread. Although, in my family, so does gout--so I'm tryin' to keep a safe distance.

BEULAH chuckles, rearranging the flowers in a vase.

AUNT BLANCHE

These from the garden?

BEULAH

Didn't want them to go to waste.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, vandalized or not, that garden made some beautiful flowers.

BEULAH hands her a flower. A HONK
HONK outside.

BEULAH

Guess the reporter's here.

AUNT BLANCHE

Remember--hold your head high, and no apologizin', you hear me?

(beat)

Now... let's give 'em somethin' to write about!

LIGHTS OUT

ACT II - SCENE II*THELSIE MAE'S & SNACKCAKE'S
HOUSES*

*The next day. LIGHTS UP on
THELSIE and SNACKCAKE, on each
side of the stage (like
earlier). THELSIE is reading
the paper She has a MARTINI
next to her, as usual.*

THELSIE

"In a devastating turn of events, the picturesque flower garden of esteemed resident Beulah Bumpinpickles was left in ruins, just as it was set to be the centerpiece of our beloved town's lifestyle section. What was once a haven of blooms is now a colorful mosaic of mayhem."

SNACKCAKE

If you fart crooked, the Beaverton Gazette picks up the story.

THELSIE

"As the community rallies around Beulah in support, there's a whisper of hope that justice will prevail. Sheriff Hubert Hornbuckle, the town's lawman, has vowed to leave no stone unturned in the search for the culprits. 'I will absolutely not sleep until I've sniffed out the varmints responsible for this dastardly deed. Now I'm off to bed,' as he said good night, and closed his door." UGH.

SNACKCAKE

What an absolute dilrod. (Mocking Sheriff) "With all due respect, I can't help you. I got a donut farm to visit."

They burst into laughter, trying to
outdo each other.

THELSIE

"With all due respect, Sheriff, having you is like losing THREE great men."

SNACKCAKE

Bobby Dwayne! Git that rawhide outta your mouth and give it back to the dog! Not your sister, THE DOG! What the hell is wrong with my child-

THELSIE

Speakin' of hell-i'll give two guesses who tried to sit next to me at the Grin n' Grub?

SNACKCAKE

The sheriff?

THELSIE

Yep. The new waitress asked what he wanted, and do you know what he said?

SNACKCAKE

What?

THELSIE

"You... on a plate."

SNACKCAKE

And that's her first impression of our illustrious townfolk. What'd she do?

THELSIE

She just gave that polite little smile we all do, like, 'bless your heart' but with our faces, you know? Then—bam!—he spins around to look at someone comin' in and dumps his Coke all over himself. It went straight to the crotch, no detours. Then he strutted past the Red Hat Ladies, all of 'em laughin' so hard they nearly lost their dentures. It was a sticky walk of shame.

SNACKCAKE

See? Serves him right.

They exchange a light laugh,
then...

SNACKCAKE CON'T

Why do I almost feel bad for him?

THELSIE

Oh, I don't know. Maybe 'cause he's a product of his raisin'?

SNACKCAKE

Never an excuse. Times have changed.

THELSIE

They don't mean to be oppressive. It's just how stupid people are. Ever heard of Dunning-Kruger?

SNACKCAKE

Who's she?

THELSIE

Bless your heart.

SNACKCAKE

I just don't get why Southerners get blamed for everything.

THELSIE

Change moves like molasses, sugar. Not everyone is "misinformed."

SNACKCAKE

You know, this mess with Beulah has just got me thinking.

THELSIE

About what?

SNACKCAKE

Just how divided we all have become. Now this?

THELSIE

What? The destruction of "The Prized Garden of Beaverton Proper?"

SNACKCAKE

Well bigger than that. But yes, that too. (Gasp/Realization)
You know whut?

THELSIE

Whut?

SNACKCAKE

Oh my stars....It's been right in front of me this whole time! I know how to get to the bottom of this! Duh!

THELSIE

Really?! Like how you get to the bottom of an apple pie?

SNACKCAKE

I got my trusty Sylvia Browne book on psychic powers! And according to her, all I need is somethin' personal of hers... and then, darlin', the magic happens!

THELSIE

Well slap me and call me Susan. Book on psychic powers?! By **who?**

SNACKCAKE

Sylvia Brown! My psychic idol. She told me once when I met her, she could tell I had "*the gift*." She gave me a whole \$250 off the price of her "*Third Eye Training Bundle*". It came with a scented candle called "spirit fog," a velvet bag of moondust, and a CD called "unlock your inner Astral Platypus." I had brought her a bundt cake.

THELSIE

Ha. I'm sure she saw you comin'.

SNACKCAKE

I met her at a "Psychic-**Con**." She blessed my rune. (roo-in)

THELSIE

Psychic-CON?! (laughs) Heavy on the CON. Oh my gawd-you're so gullible. (aside) I should really stop day-drinkin' with this woman.

SNACKCAKE

Hold on (puts phone to chest) BOBBY DWAYNE! You got your butt down off the counter! DO NOT GIVE THE BABY A MEAT CLEAVER! Are you on crack?!

THELSIE

Oh sweet Jesus.

SNACKCAKE

THIS INSTANT!

SNACKCAKE moves quickly as if to dodge something was thrown at her. SOUND EFFECT of the "toing" of a knife that has been thrown and stuck in wood. Behind her, a knife is stuck into a picture of her.

SNACKCAKE CON'T

(Gasps) DID YOU THROW A KNIFE AT ME!

THELSIE

(beat) Well... I guess the spirits answered that one.
(beat) Well?

SNACKCAKE

(Collecting self) What do you know about Brie?

THELSIE

Just that she moved here with her Daddy from somewhere up around St. Louis or somethin', and her and Tommy are good friends. Why?!

SNACKCAKE

Awfully "coincident-if-al" that she moves here, and then... this?

THELSIE

Would you use that walnut between your ears and think. Why on Earth would she do something like that?

SNACKCAKE

For attention! Nobody knows her, right?

THELSIE

Well, Tommy does! Your brains playin' hide and seek, and it's losin.'

SNACKCAKE

You ever notice how she's just a little too supportive? She's playin' the looong game. (gasps) WHAT IF SHE'S A.... WITCH?!"

THELSIE

Are you off your rocker? Oh yeah, she bides her time, uproots her whole life to move to the middle of nowhere, and—gasp—casts spells between PTA meetin's and couponing at the Piggly Wiggly! Real diabolical, Snackcake.

SNACKCAKE

I just need *something personal* of hers.

THELSIE

Oh God.

SNACKCAKE

Like a ring, or- (gasps, as she did before when she had her vision) I know!

THELSIE

These schemes of yours never work out. That book is as useless as Sylvia Brown herself was... You know that woman literally destroyed lives with her wrong 'readin's.' She literally told a woman in an audience one time that her daughter was dead, and to stop lookin'. Then, they found her. You're dumb.

SNACKCAKE

You just leave this to me. Trust me.

THELSIE

Last time I trusted you, I woke up in someone's yard, with a nose ring, and two "m"s tattooed on each butt cheek. Forever now, when I bend over, it says "mom."

BEAT. Then...

SNACKCAKE

Yeah, but when your on your back it says-

THELSIE

Snackcake! It's traumatic enough!

SNACKCAKE

Well, what happens in Fredricktown, stays in Fredricktown.

THELSIE

Thank God for that. You and your hair-brained schemes. I swear. I guess we'll see.

SNACKCAKE

I guess we will.

THELSIE

I guess so.

SNACKCAKE

Uh-huh.

THELSIE

Yeah.

SNACKCAKE

Hmm hmmm.

THELSIE

Did someone blow out your pilot light?! You are so annoying! Like a big, dumb baby!

SNACKCAKE

Ha ha. You know you love me. I got cookies to bake! This is getting excitin'! I'll see you... At Beulah's!

THELSIE

Oh, dear Lord above....

LIGHTS OUT

ACT II - SCENE III

BEAULAH'S HOME - LIGHTS UP on BEAULAH's cozy country kitchen and living area. It's mid-afternoon. A ceiling fan hums lazily.

BRIE is looking through a leather-bound book of TOMMY'S ARTWORK.

BRIE

Your portfolio--these are all so good. You are so talented. This is what you sent them?

Outside, a CLANG echoes--the sound of a loud town bell.

BRIE CONT'D

What's that bell for?

TOMMY

Three o'clock. On the dot, every day of this third week April, that's when they say the last beaver placed the final stick in the Great Beaverton Dam. (He gestures reverently) Sacred moment around here. Hold on a second. Watch this...

TOMMY heads to the door, and calls out:

TOMMY

Beaver call!

Someone far off shouts "Beaver call!" It echoes closer and closer until someone yells "Praise the dam!"

TOMMY

(mock reverence) Sacred moment. Tradition. Community.

BRIE

(laughs) Ain't that somethin'? And they know to answer back?

TOMMY CONT'D

Yep. Beaver time, baby, Never late, never early--just "dam" punctual.

BRIE

"Dam punctual"? You made a funny...

TOMMY

Let's go get a milkshake. I'm about to melt!

BRIE

No, we promised your daddy we'd wait for Buck.

TOMMY

(like a child) But I don't wanna...

BRIE

You're funny... So, I was just thinking.

TOMMY

Good to use your thinker! Are you wondering why somebody this good-looking ain't hitched?

BRIE

I already know the answer to that, but noooo.

TOMMY

Well shoot.

BRIE

When are you going to tell your momma?

TOMMY

That... I don't know. Me and Momma are close, real close, but... It might just break her heart, you know? And I'll have to move away and-

BRIE

She loves you. She's going to support you anyway she can.

TOMMY

You don't know my mother!

BRIE

Well I know good people. I think I'm a good judge of character.

TOMMY

Small towns are weird. We all know each other, and--

BRIE

What better folks to have your back? They'll support your decisions. Don't be underestimating 'em.

TOMMY

I dunno. But... (beat) so... I just got to come out and say it?

BRIE

Exactly.

TOMMY

Just do it?

BRIE

Yes NIKE! Rip off the Band-Aid!

TOMMY

YES! right off! (Beat) but...

BRIE

But?! But what?

TOMMY

Chicken butt!

BRIE

(rolls eyes) Lord help me.

TOMMY

Look, can we just talk about somethin' else for a bit?

BRIE

Really? (TOMMY nods) Ok.

TOMMY

I'm all ears.

BRIE

Umm. Beaverton proper, what's the up with it? The name, I mean. Is it REALLY about beavers?

TOMMY

Isn't everything?

BRIE

(Laughing) It's just ripe for double entendre's. Like, if this was a movie, or a play-

TOMMY

Tell me about it. I've lived it. By the time you're 12, the jokes no longer funny. And that's when EVERYTHING is funny.

BRIE

So why the infatuation?

TOMMY

(He tells the story
with a bit of a
mocking tone))

Well, apparently when this lovely area was settled, it was all about the beavers. And no, not because they wanted to kill 'em or eat 'em—those beavers were left to their own devices. Turns out, the little critters had a knack for building dams, routing the water just right—made this whole area lush and perfect for farming. They call it the second eden.

BRIE

You know, if you're not from here, and you just read about "celebrating beavers"...

TOMMY

Hilarious, I know. But, anyway. That's how the whole yearly "Beaver Nation Celebration" began.

BRIE

Great name, I must admit.

TOMMY

A whole weekend devoted to the mighty and majestic beaver in all its glory. We've got parades, beaver dam-building

contests, a cornbread sculpture contest, beavertinis, "guess the critter"...and even a crown for Miss Beaverton Proper herself. Last year's queen did a "synchronized swimming on dry land" routine--lots of arm flailing.

BRIE

That's interesting. And everybody knows everybody.

TOMMY

Yep.

BRIE

Must make dating... adventurous.

BRIE

So, who do you think messed up your momma's garden then?

TOMMY

Ugh, I see what you did there, you tricked me! It's all just so triflin' and confusin'. I really don't care, to be honest. It was probably the wind.

BRIE

No. It looks intentional. Is that the heat talkin'?

TOMMY

I've never been known for bein' an angel.

BRIE

Doesn't it bother you, though?

TOMMY

Oh yes. The humidity just wreaks havoc on my hair.

BRIE

(sighs) You know what I mean! About your momma's garden. I know you-you're a very kind soul.

TOMMY

Yes. But don't tell anyone! Shhhh!

BRIE

Afraid someone might find out you're actually got a big heart?

TOMMY

(speaking monotone) Men are supposed to have strong arms, big tractors... small, stony hearts.

BRIE

Lips zipped.

TOMMY

I have an inferiority complex, but not a very good one.

They share a warm laugh. The Bell
CLANGS again, startling them.

TOMMY

Ah—must be three-fifteen. Somewhere, someone's performing a
"beaver-inspired interpretive dance."

The hear someone outside.

TOMMY CONT'D

Milkshake time! Buck's here!

They head to door. Out of no where,
DELBERT HOTCHKISS appears in the
doorway, surprising them.

BRIE

Oh, hey, can we help you?

TOMMY

You're not Buck.

DELBERT

No. I have never been know by that name. I am Delbert
Hotchkiss. I'm a student a Beaverton Trade School with a 4.0
GPA. I don't mean to bother you as it was not, nor ever is
it my intention to 'bother' anyone.

BRIE

Okaaaay. Do... you want to come in?

TOMMY

Yes, please, come on in.

DELBERT

Thank you for your hospitality as it is very much
appreciated.

TOMMY

Yeah, sure. What can I do for you? Mr.-?

DELBERT

Hotchkiss.

TOMMY

Interesting name, Delbert.

DELBERT

I've always enjoyed it. (.) Is there a Beulah Bumpinpickles
I might speak with? I promise not to take much of her time.

BRIE

Are you sellin' solar panels or somethin'?

TOMMY

'Cause if you are, we're not interested. We don't believe in *killin' whales*.

DELBERT

I believe that bit of *misinformation* was about wind power, and no--i'm not. There is just something I would like to discuss with her that is of a personal nature. No offense to either of you as I hope I do not come across as such.

BRIE

Across as what?

DELBERT

Offensive, ma'am.

TOMMY

Ok. Well, Delbert, I can take a message-

DELBERT

No, thank you. Is there an appropriate time I could return?

TOMMY

She's got folks comin' over this evening to discuss "something" that happened. Maybe then?

DELBERT

Then it shall be. I'll return later today.

TOMMY

Are you sure you ain't a Mormon or tryin' to sell something?

DELBERT

No sir. I am not associated with any religious organization, nor am I a salesperson, nor am I employed by any such company, OR companies in which my employment would entail of my selling any type of belief system or product designed to harm marine wildlife.

TOMMY

Just makin' sure now.

DELBERT

I am, and always have been, a person who walks tall with integrity. My Grandma Nola always told me that I am someone who prides himself with being truthful and (like Forrest Gump) re- ve-rent (reverent with a hard 'T' at the end)

TOMMY

Well, you continue to walk tall, Delbert.

DELBERT

As tall as I can, even if I were... short. (awkward laugh at own joke)

They try to play along, but look at each other.

DELBERT makes his way to the door stops, looks at them, and says...

DELBERT

Looks like a turf war out there. Be careful.

TOMMY

Will do. Bye now!

BRIE

See ya.

DELBERT leaves quickly.

TOMMY

Well, he was... interesting.

BRIE

What the hell did he mean by that?

TOMMY

No clue. For the past ten minutes, I felt like I was in the Twilight zone.

BUFORD enters carrying a bag.

BUFORD

Well, I'm here so you don't gotta sit around waitin' for Buck. What's goin' on in here?

TOMMY

Talkin' suspects. If I was a bettin' man, and somebody made me name who did it—

BUFORD

Who did what?

BRIE

Tore up your wife's garden.

BUFORD

Oh?

TOMMY

I was sayin', if I *had* to pick, I'd say Thelsie Mae.

BRIE

Really?!

BUFORD

Thelsie!? Why on earth would you think that?

TOMMY

'Cause she's had it in for momma since-

BUFORD

Since prom?

TOMMY

Oh my gawd, listen to me-why do I even care!? But yeah.

BUFORD

Son, I know how word gets around. This town's so small the grocery store's also the post office, the town hall, and if you're lucky, your Friday night date spot.

BRIE

And a bank, don't forget about that.

BUFORD

I just don't think Thelsie's really capable of something like that.

BRIE

Really? How come?

BUFORD

Can't name a soul here who'd do such a thing. Sure, they might trade your soul for a pack of smokes and a box of wine, but tearing up a garden? That's... "egregious." That's the word, right?

BRIE

Yes sir. And a good one!

BUFORD

Now, Lord knows I've been as wrong, but that's my gut talkin'.

There's a honk outside.

BUFORD CONT'D

Oh, looks like Bucks finally here.

TOMMY

You really think no one around here did it?

BUFORD

Son, it's easy to get caught up in bad news. Seems like that's all they wanna sell. But the world's better than it looks from the headlines. Bad news sells papers—good news don't.

BRIE

Well said Mr. Bumpinpickles.

TOMMY

Guess we've been focused on the wrong thing.

BUFORD

If you take a step back and really look, you'll see we've always got a lot more in common than we don't.

BRIE

I really like your daddy.

BUFORD heads to the door. SNACKCAKE
just APPEARS Holding a plate of
cookies covered in aluminum foil.

SNACKCAKE

(Loudly) Hi!

BUFORD

JESUS jumped up! Snackcake! Lord have mercy, what are you—a prairie dog? You just popped up outta nowhere! Thought I was havin' a stroke!

SNACKCAKE

I get that a lot. Hello, Buford. When I was little, I used to dig tunnels all over the backyard—I'd just pop up and scare the stew outta everybody. Momma said I was part groundhog, part honey badger... all problem.

She smooths her hair, pretends to
casually drop by.

SNACKCAKE CONT'D

I just wanted to stop by before Beulah's big investigatory-ishy gatherin' thingy tonight and drop somethin' off.

BUFORD

Oh you didn't have to do that.

SNACKCAKE

Oh I know. But you know me. I appear out of nowhere, *POOF!!* like an angel, bearing gifts!

She makes a dramatic "ta-da!" gesture, nearly hitting Buford in the face.

Then-a beat-she "notices" TOMMY and BRIE for the first time.

SNACKCAKE

(sweetly) Oh, hey Tommy! ... (squints, coldly) Brie.

BRIE instantly looks guilty, confused-checking teeth, shirt, everything.

BRIE

Uh, hi?

TOMMY

We were just headin' out.

SNACKCAKE

Oh now, don't rush off! What's the hurry? I brought treats!

BUFORD

What you got there Snackcake? A bundt?

SNACKCAKE

Oh, this? Just a little somethin'. Why don't the two of you just sit for a spell

BUFORD reaches for the cookie plate-she slaps his hand without looking at him.

SNACKCAKE CON'T

(sweetly, through teeth) Not you.

BUFORD

Oh, ok then.

SNACKCAKE

I just wanna make sure they're good before servin' them tonight.

TOMMY

(Smiling) These ain't poisoned, are they?!

Explosive cackle, the kind that rattles glassware.

SNACKCAKE

Not THIS batch!

BRIE freezes, big eyed.

SNACKCAKE

These are my Grandma Luella's famous Choco-Rocko chocolate chip cookies.

They all nervously laugh. This scene should be directed to get reactions and such from the actors that the audience can laugh at.

SNACKCAKE CON'T

(coaxing) Go ahead. Take one!

BRIE

(Feigning excitement) Oh yay, these look so... good!

SNACKCAKE

Made with finest ingredients! Go ahead. Tommy?

TOMMY

(mouthful) Yes, very good!

SNACKCAKE

What's in them, you say? Oh, I thought you'd never ask.

BRIE

Uh, we didn't.

BRIE and TOMMY should be seated downstage, facing the audience on the sofa/loveseat that AUNT BLANCHE sat on earlier. This is done so the only person who can see what SNACKCAKE is doing is Buford and the audience.

SNACKCAKE

Let's see .. there's flour, bakin' soda, a little salt, sugar... brown sugar...

She paces behind them like a shark, pulling a ZIPLOC from her purse.

BRIE

Brown sugar? I can taste it.

SNACKCAKE

Uh-huh. There's an egg, some semisweet chips, a few chopped walnuts. (Sweetly) You're not allergic to walnuts, are you, Brie?

BRIE

Uh, no?

SNACKCAKE

(Under her breath) Damn.

BRIE

What?

SNACKCAKE

I said "great!". Wouldn't want you having an anal-fla-dactical reaction.

BRIE

You mean anaphylactic?

SNACKCAKE

You sure are a smart one, ain't cha? Anyway, there's oooooone last **secret** ingredient.

TOMMY

What is that?

She's right behind BRIE now. Slow.
Suspenseful.

(As she says "LOVE," she plucks out
one of BRIE'S hairs from the top of
her head)

SNACKCAKE

Grandma Luella always said the most important ingredient,
the one thing you must never forget... is...

(beat)

LOVE! (pluck!)

BRIE

OOOW!! (turns around) What was that?!

SNACKCAKE freezes. Big innocent
smile. One hand behind her back
clutching the hair, the other the
Ziploc.

SNACKCAKE

Oh my gosh, did you see that mosquito? Flew off that way! No
wonder, with this humidity!

BUFORD

(stern) Now Snackcake-

BRIE turns away again. SNAP! She
shoves the hair into the Ziploc,

tosses it in her purse, regains
composure.

SNACKCAKE

(With rapid-fire cheer) Well, would ya look at the time!
Gotta run-things to do, places to be, potions to brew—I mean
errands! It's been so lovely, but I simply must dash! Y'all
take care now, toodle-oo, love ya, buh-bye-bye-bye-bye!
Kisses!

And SNACKCAKE is gone, as quickly
as she appeared. They are left
there, as if a tornado hit them. A
long beat.

TOMMY

...Did she just steal your DNA?

BRIE

I... think she did.

BUFORD

(Shrugs) At least she didn't take a cookie.

TOMMY

That was weird, even for Snackcake.

BUFORD

Well, you never know with that woman. I swear, she's like a
possum at a church picnic—you think you know what she's
doin', but you don't.

A loud HONK HONK outside.

BUFORD

Oh goody! Buck's actually here!

BRIE

Wait, what do you mean? You think she's up to somethin'?

BUFORD

Oh, yeah.

TOMMY

You know somethin' we don't?

BUFORD

(Reclines, folds arms) Well, I reckon it's all in the eye of
the beholder. Can't quite put my finger on it, but somethin'
about that whole performance just don't sit right.

Beat. He rubs his belly.

BUFORD

My gut's talkin'-and when my gut talks, I listen. And it's tellin' me this is fixin' to be one interestin' night. Yep... one real interestin' meetin'.

He looks at them. They look at each other. A beat of uneasy silence.

TOMMY

You mean psychic-interestin'... or police-report-interestin'?

A beat. Buford giggles, shrugs, then heads out the door.

BRIE

Oh lord.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT III - SCENE IV

BEULAH'S HOME

The LIGHTS come up on BEULAH, AUNT BLANCHE, and BUFORD. It is later in the day.

BEULAH

I'm just gonna call everyone and tell them not to come.

AUNT BLANCHE

Good. And what other people think of you ain't none of your business. Keep standing tall and tending to what makes your heart bloom.

BUFORD

I got an idea! Let's just dig it all up, drive to the New Hamburg nursery, you pick the prettiest flowers, and we'll have it looking as good as new.

BEULAH

That's sweet, Boofy, but it's late in the season and-

SNACKCAKE bursts in, startling them.

SNACKCAKE

BEULAH, darlin'?

BEULAH

Come on in, Snackcake! I was just about to call everyone—

SNACKCAKE

Beulah, honey, how you feelin'?

BEULAH

Better than I thought I would.

SNACKCAKE

Good! (To TOMMY) BOBBY DWAYNE! I'm not in the mood today! Be RE-SPECT-FUL!

BEULAH

I just want you to know—

SNACKCAKE

I'd rather walk on my lips wearing cleats than speak ill of anyone, but—

AUNT BLANCHE

Those cleats must be worn clear down to nubs.

SNACKCAKE

I'll just say it. Just get it out there.

BEULAH

If it's about the garden—

TOMMY enters.

SNACKCAKE

I think BRIE did this.

TOMMY

Brie?!

BRIE enters at the door.

BRIE

What? Did you say my name?

BEULAH

Now hold on—

TOMMY

Snackcake accused you—

BRIE

The garden thing?! Why would you think I did this?!

SNACKCAKE

This! (Clutches her RUNE necklace) I have my "gift." I mean, you show up to town, nobody really knows you or your family—

BRIE

Your gift?! More like an AFFLICTION! (Realizing) Is that why you plucked a hair off my head?!

SNACKCAKE

You got this sweet act down to a "t" doncha?!

BEULAH

What was that about somethin' bein' "plucked"?

TOMMY

How do we know you didn't do this?

SNACKCAKE

I would never!

BRIE

Might have to do with stress tryin' to stop that pint-sized wrecking crew you call a child!

SNACKCAKE

My child is an absolute angel!

LOUD, exaggerated crash + comical
cat scream; everyone reacts, then
returns to dialogue.

SNACKCAKE CONT'D

As you were sayin'?

BRIE

Mrs. Beulah, I would never! I hope you know that!

BEULAH

Of course I do.

BEULAH glares at SNACKCAKE.

SNACKCAKE

I'm just out here defendin' YOU. (To BRIE) You show up, actin' sweet, tryna get in good with the family, then—bam!—secretly tear up the garden like a drama-filled scavenger hunt. What's next, burnin' down the barn for a candlelight vigil? It's the epee-tome of lending sympathy for points.

BRIE

Do you mean "epitome"? For points?! What... points?!

BEULAH

Snackcake, you're being inappropriate.

BUFORD

Would anyone like a cookie?! Bundt cake?

BRIE

What points are you talking about? I'm not used to this... drama!

SNACKCAKE

(Gasps) How dare you!

BRIE

How dare what? I didn't say anything derogatory!

AUNT BLANCHE and BEULAH shake their heads.

SNACKCAKE

(very dramatically) ***You called me dramatic!***

BRIE

No! I said "this" is dramatic—the situation!

SNACKCAKE

Ok, Miss Smarty-Pants, did the chickens stage a coup on their own?

TOMMY

Why don't you tell us? You think you're psychic!

SNACKCAKE

I predicted the McRib coming back, for God's sake!

BRIE

More like an *informed inference*.

SNACKCAKE

Stop using big words, BRIE!

BRIE

In-FORMED?! I'm feeling attacked.

BEULAH

Not how I imagined this afternoon going...

THELSIE appears at the door,
holding her MARTINI.

TOMMY

Why would you think it was her? She ain't got a problem with anyone. Why not Thelsie?

THELSIE
Thelsie what?

AUNT BLANCHE
Oh sweet Jesus.

BUFORD
Well this just got real interesting.

SNACKCAKE
You think Thelsie did it?

THELSIE
Did what? The garden?

SNACKCAKE
Yes. Apparently Colby thinks you did it!

BRIE
I DIDN'T SAY anything!

TOMMY
No, I did. But it was out of context.

THELSIE
How could accusin' me be "context"?

TOMMY
'Cause SNACKCAKE was... forcing us! When I came to the door snack cake was telling Mama that she thought Colby did it so we walked into that-

THELSIE
So, how did THAT turn into me?!

BRIE
That's what he's trying to explain! We defended ourselves, and then-ah-

TOMMY
By asking who we thought it was! Honestly, I never really cared.

SNACKCAKE
You didn't care? About your momma's garden?!

TOMMY
No! I mean, yes!

A beat. Everyone exhales.

THELSIE

Well, that breaks my heart you all would think I did it.
Especially you, Tommy.

SNACKCAKE

Oh don't act high and mighty. "Just breaks my heart!" Miss omnipotent, didn't you tell me on the phone you thought it was Tommy?

TOMMY

Me?!

SNACKCAKE

Yes, you!

THELSIE

Snackcake, I swear—

SNACKCAKE

That's what you said!

BEULAH

To get back at me?!

TOMMY

If I said anything to you Thelsie, it was between you and me.

THELSIE

Because he's always wanted to show off his creativity, and you weren't helping with classes, theater, art...

BEULAH

Is this true?

TOMMY

(A beat) No! I mean...

THELSIE

Didn't you wish your momma cared more about your talents?

TOMMY

Yeah... but that doesn't mean I'd destroy her garden! I'm not a monster!

AUNT BLANCHE

Everyone, this is getting out of hand.

BUFORD

Oh, it's nice having everyone gathered like this.

THELSIE

Just like a family reunion!

BUFORD

Are we ignoring the elephant in the room?

THELSIE

Oh, you mean Snackcake?!

SNACKCAKE

(Gasps) HOW DARE YOU!

AUNT BLANCHE

Look. Maybe it was mother nature. Maybe it was a deer, or something. Who cares! It's not important, if you would just let Beulah speak. She has something to say.

BEULAH

Well, I don't know now.

AUNT BLANCHE

(Slightly disappointed) Oh, Beulah.

SNACKCAKE

(Leaning forward) All I know is I didn't do it. And I think if it were someone here, they should just speak up, and get it over with...(patting her foot, arms crossed) Brie?!

TOMMY

Well, I didn't do it. That's all I know.

THELSIE

I mean, for all we know, it could have been AUNT BLANCHE?!

AUNT BLANCHE

ME? (to herself) Calm down Blanche, your too old for this.

THELSIE

I didn't mean you *actually*... What I'm trying to say is-It could have been anybody.

BEULAH

Maybe it was just an accident. Maybe the wind or somethin'. I really don't-

THELSIE

The wind? Beulah, bless your heart, but that garden didn't uproot itself and fling dirt halfway across the yard. That's stupid.

BEULAH

Did you call me stupid?!

SNACKCAKE

I think she did!

THELSIE

I did not!

SNACKCAKE

I think this is a perfect time to tell you Beulah, but Thelsie thinks you stole Buford away from her.

THELSIE

Snackcake! You have had that wrong!

SNACKCAKE

I'm tired of hearing about it. Might as well get it out there. While we're at it!

BEULAH

Are you still harboring that?!

THELSIE

I don't know how many times I have to explain--I was there for the TWO OF YOU, but you ruined my prom because you came in all blubberin' and carryin' on and left with Buford after I had-

BEULAH

But you know me and Buford were dating at the time.

THELSIE

Oh my God, let me finish! It wasn't about a man! Not every God-damned situation that a woman is involved with revolves around a man! If you'd get your head out of your ass, I was perfectly fine going by myself. To support YOU two!

BEULAH

Well, I couldn't-

THELSIE

When Buford asked me to go-

BEULAH

I knew you were upset, but you have harbored this ill will this whole time?

THELSIE

You don't listen! I was left there, looking like a fool!

BEULAH

Left where?!

THELSIE

At prom, Beulah! At prom! Because not only was I crowned PROM QUEEN by default-something I never wanted, nor cared about-everyone knew it was supposed to be you.

BEULAH

That's not my fault?!

THELSIE

I stood there, frozen, on that stage, awkwardly trapped in a place I had never asked for, crown on my head. The applause was weak, half-hearted, as they announced Buford as Prom King. But you--you had already bolted, running out the door with him. And me? I was stuck, standing there, this stupid crown on my head I had never wanted, doing the very thing I came to avoid: *being the center of attention*. I didn't care about prom, I didn't care about prom king or queen, I never even wanted to go--I just wanted to be there--**for the both of you!** But, you left me there, standing in the spotlight--a spotlight I never asked for--looking absolutely ridiculous, crown on my head. (beat) I ended up alone, applauded by nobody, with nothing but the echo of a night that wasn't mine. Doesn't anybody get that?!

SNACKCAKE

I looked good that night.

THELSIE

Oh my gawd, you looked like a pinata after the PARTY'S over.

BEULAH

Saying this now?! After all these years?! I thought you knew!

THELSIE

Knew what?!

BEULAH

Why I didn't-*couldn't* go to prom.

THELSIE

Because you and Buford had a fight?! Right?!

BEULAH

No! Well, sorta.

THELSIE

Sorta what! So tell me! Why couldn't the Queen Sheba go to prom?!

BEULAH

BECAUSE I HAD JUST FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT!

A beat.

THELSIE

Pregnant? With-

BUFORD comes up behind BEULAH to console her.

BEULAH

Yes. With Tommy.

They all look at TOMMY. He WAVES.

THELSIE

You were pregnant before prom?

BEULAH CONT'D

Yes. Momma caught on quick. I tried to hide it, but she was always in my business. She knew everything. That's why I tried so hard not to meddle in Tommy's life like she did with mine. Maybe I made a mistake, but I didn't want to be her. She made me go to the doctor, and when the results came back, Mama and Daddy just started planning my life like I wasn't even there. That's when I knew, I wasn't lettin' them take control.

THELSIE

I didn't know.

BEULAH

And then Buford came over. It turned into this huge fight, but he was already in his tuxedo. I thought it'd be better to be alone, to just try and figure things out. So, I told Buford to go on without me, to call you. I thought you knew, I really did.

THELSIE

You still left me there, lookin' stupid, when I could have helped you through it.

BEULAH

You would have told everybody.

THELSIE

I'm sorry you think that, but no... I would not have.

BEULAH

So this was you? My garden? A vendetta over some high school prom nonsense?

THELSIE

I give up.

BEULAH

I was giving everyone the benefit of the doubt-

THELSIE

You think I am stupid enough to tear up some ugly garden?!

BEULAH

Ugly?!

SNACKCAKE

That garden was gorgeous!

BEULAH

Oh, butt out Snackcake!

SNACKCAKE

Well, I never...

THELSIE

All of this, because of some stupid thing that happened in high school!

SNACKCAKE

Well, you just implied it wasn't so stupid!

THELSIE

Great. Now I even feel stupider! Of course, YOUR story is sadder than mine! As USUAL!

BEULAH

Why is it always a stupid competition with you!

TOMMY

Somebody say *stupid* again!

THELSIE

And don't you dare pin this on me! I have never trampled a garden in my life! Are you trying to make me look like a GD fool?

SNACKCAKE

I don't think you need any help with that!

THELSIE

Shut up Snackcake! Pick a side!

SNACKCAKE

Don't tell me to shut up!

AUNT BLANCHE

Lord, it's like herdin' cats in a tornado!

BEULAH

The truth always finds a way to come out, sooner or later. Honestly, I was at the point where I didn't even care anymore. Someone did it.

SNACKCAKE

Thelsie, you should be ashamed of yourself!

THELSIE

Oh, shut up, you cow!

SNACKCAKE

(Funny shriek) You take that back, you ass crack!

THELSIE

Ass crack?! What are you, twelve?

SNACKCAKE

Oh like calling someone a COW makes you mature?!

BEULAH

You're both being assholes!

THELSIE

How dare you Beulah!

SNACKCAKE

Don't you yell at Beulah!

THELSIE

She called you one too!

SNACKCAKE

(Beat, Funny shriek) How dare you Beulah!

BEULAH

Oh, come off it, Snackcake.

THELSIE

Snackcakes's the asshole.

SNACKCAKE

Well, someone has to keep the world moving—you're welcome for doing my part!

AUNT BLANCHE

Would you all just stop it! I can't take any more of this.

BEULAH

Aunt Blanche—

AUNT BLANCHE

No. This is not what we talked about.

BEULAH

I'm sorry—

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh for heaven's sake—just stop with the apologies! I've been around long enough to see a few storms, and honey, this

world right now feels like a tornado spun outta crazy. I don't even turn on the news anymore--too much yelling, not enough understandin.' Everybody's mad at everybody. Folks are fightin' with their neighbors, their cousins, their Facebook friends--over the dumbest things!

And don't even get me started on the politicians. All of 'em! They stir the pot when they know better, and we're the ones cleanin' up the mess!

You know what I think? I think we've all forgot what team we're on. Families fallin' out, and meanwhile, the rest of us--down here on the front lines, the ones payin' bills and raisin' kids--well, we're just tryin' to make it through the week with our sanity in tack, and enough money to put food on the table. Maybe it's time we quit lookin' across at each other tryin' to find someone to blame--and start lookin' up, before we forget what hope even looks like.

Beulah, I am sorry someone destroyed your garden, I truly am, but y'all, this has got to stop.

AUNT BLANCHE exits.

THELSIE

Look what y'all did! You got Aunt Blanche all flustered up, like a drag queen at a yard sale!

They all stare daggers at her.

THELSIE CONT'D

Ok, maybe I had something to do with it too.

BEULAH

I don't like where this heading. But I just have to say...I have been nothing but good to the both of you-

THELSIE

Are you delusional? You sure do think highly of yourself. That's like the ass pretending the crack is the problem.

BEULAH

I bet you could finance a Ferrari with your swear jar!

THELSIE

Are you high?! You've been as good to me as a fart in church-loud, embarrassing, and no one wants to claim you!

SNACKCAKE

(Reacting) Did you just call her a fart? Now who's twelve?!

THELSIE

And you ain't no better.

SNACKCAKE

I've always been VERY good to you!

THELSI--

You have been as good to me as a hemorrhoid—painful, irritatin', and impossible to get rid of!

SNACKCAKE

"GASP!"

BEULAH

(trying not to laugh) Thelsie Mae!

SNACKCAKE

You're being so vitter-lolic!

THELSIE

Did YOU call me an ALCOHOLIC?! (Sloshing her martini) How DARE you! (Looks at Martini like "oh")

BEULAH

I think she meant vitriolic, Thelsie.

THELSIE

I don't care what that gutter snipe meant, BEULAH.

BEULAH

Thelsie Mae!

THELSIE

(Mocking) "Thelsie Mae!" Oh shut up.

SNACKCAKE

Don't you tell her to shut up!

BEULAH

I don't need your help!

THELSIE

Beulah Hortense Bumpinpickles! You know whut?! (She hesitate, trying to think of something)

BEULAH

Whut?!

All of a sudden, there's a loud knock at the door.

BEULAH CONT'D

Jesus Jumped up!

SHERIFF enters, wearing his mirrored sunglasses, holding

DELBERT'S shirt, like a kid being caught. DELBERT is in handcuffs.

SHERIFF

Buford?! Beulah! I always get my man! Nothin' get's by me.

BEULAH

Dear Lord, sheriff?!

AUNT BLANCHE enters from the other room.

AUNT BLANCHE

Hubert! What on Earth?!

DELBERT

Would you please unhand me, you... BRUTE!

SHERIFF

What'd you call me!? You just HOLD your pud, there boy.

DELBERT

Pud!? I'm scared, I don't know what I'm supposed to HOLD!

BEULAH

Sheriff, please.

Comedically, the SHERIFF shakes DELBERT a bit while DELBERT lets out comical squeals and squeaks and such.

SHERIFF

Looks like I caught the culprit! Found him snoopin' around your garden--I think this here is who you been lookin' for. Just out back there, on your property!

Again, SHERIFF handles him as he squeaks/squeals again.

DELBERT

Please unhand me you ...! Let go of me or I'll-

SHERIFF

You'll what?!

DELBERT

(Shyly) Nothing.

AUNT BLANCHE goes over to them.

AUNT BLANCHE

Hubert Gottfried Hornbuckle! Let go of that boy, right now!

SHERIFF

(taking off his glasses) Alright Blanche. You rough him up.

AUNT BLANCHE gives him a look/rolls eyes.

SHERIFF reluctantly releases him.

AUNT BLANCHE

(To DELBERT) Well, I know it seems like the elevator doesn't go all the way to the top floor, but underneath all that, he's actually got a heart as big as a pasture.

SHERIFF

Thank you Blanche. I appreciate that.

SNACKCAKE

Oh my God! A big OGRE of a man... With mirrors for eyes! and... DAVID AND GOLIATH! DAVID AND GOLIATH! I told you I had the gift! I told y'all!

SNACKCAKE grabs and kisses her "rune."

They all look at each other surprised at her vision coming true.

BEULAH

What is going on?

AUNT BLANCHE

Are you ok, Hon?

DELBERT

I think so.

AUNT BLANCHE

Now, who are you? What are you doing snoopin' around here?

TOMMY

(realizing) Oh, yeah, I remember you!

DELBERT

Oh my God. I feel like I've just been... dangled by a giant. This isn't really my style, you know? I mean, I'm more of a sit-down, read-a-book kind of guy, not... (looks at sheriff) THIS! I thought I'd just... talk to the person who owns that flower garden. (To Snackcake) Mrs. Bumpinpickles?

SNACKCAKE

No, I'm sorry.

DELBERT
(To Thelsie) Mrs.-

THELSIE
Wrong again!

DELBERT pulls out his thick
glasses.

BEULAH
I'm Beulah--Mrs. Bumpinpickles, if you will.

DELBERT
(nervously adjusting his glasses and fidgeting) Yes, hello,
my name is Delbert Hotchkiss. I do not want to interrupt
your, uh... awkward, yet may I honestly say, "entertaining"
fight, but I have been looking to speak to you, Mrs.
Bumpinpickles. About your lovely flower garden. I may have
information you want.

BEULAH
My flower garden?

DELBERT
I go to the local trade school, I maintain a 4.0 GPA, and
I'm studying the magnificent beaver. I'm working real hard
on my degree in .. Beaverology. They all look around at each
other, confused.

BUFORD
I've always been partial to beavers myself.

SHERIFF
A majestic creature.

DELBERT CONT'D
It's a very... (glances around as everyone looks extremely
confused) niche field, but I'm committed.

SHERIFF
Niche? Sounds like a "dam" good field!

They all react, roll their eyes at
his stupid joke.

SHERIFF CONT'D
You know? Dams? Beavers?

AUNT BLANCHE
(Annoyed) YES, we get it.

THELSIE

Beaverology?! You study the animal, or is this about Snackcake's dating life?

AUNT BLANCHE

Hush!

DELBERT

Every since I was a very young person, I have always been drawn to beavers and other such wild creatures that run amuck around here.

THELSIE

You must have studied Snackcake's children then-

SNACKCAKE

How rude!

They all giggle.

AUNT BLANCHE

Snackcake... Just... (To DELBERT) Please continue.

DELBERT

I do not believe that children have been part of my study.

SNACKCAKE CON'T

(Looking at everybody) What? Ok! My child's a little rambunctious!

THELSIE

Rambunctious?! You need a tranquilizer gun and a net just to settle him down!

AUNT BLANCHE

Ok, stop it! Shsh! Delbert? Continue.

DELBERT

To make a long story short, while making observations, which just so happened, I had view of your garden, and I saw it being destroyed, and I just wanted to let you know, as a witness, **who** did it.

BEULAH

You saw who did it?

DELBERT

I sure did. I hate that I have to be the one to call **them** out. I don't want to cause them any trouble.

They all lean in.

DELBERT CONT'D

I would hate to think that I would be a person to cause any more division within your group here. But... I think it is important to know, nonetheless.

SNACKCAKE

Nonetheless taken.

AUNT BLANCHE

Hush! It's okay, Delbert.

DELBERT

So, here it goes. It was very dark and foggy the other night. I sat, cloaked in camouflage, with my notebook and pencil in hand. Just then, I noticed a rustle. I looked! And before you know it...I saw! (a beat)

BEULAH

Dear lord, Delbert, just get to it.

DELBERT

What I saw was... I'm so sorry... But what I saw was...(Very quickly) A RACCOON AND BEAVER TURF WAR.

BEAT. There is absolute silence.
No one moves. Everyone is
(comically) in shock! DELBERT
thinks they are in shock because
they are mad at beavers. He looks
aroundat their stunned faces.

DELBERT CONT'D

Shocking, I know. But, before you get upset, I want you to know, I do not believe, to my core, that these creatures did it with any type of malice. NO-SIREE.

EVERYONE continues to be still.
DELBERT looks at everyone again.
Then-

DELBERT CONT'D

I noticed the streams drying up. The beaver population has been moving into the raccoons territory. AND Because of this, a turf war broke out something fierce between the racoons and said beavers, and over the course of one night, I watched as they absolutely, and terrifyingly destroyed and obliterated your garden.

BEULAH

My garden? Was destroyed be raccoons and beavers? Warring with each other?

As THELSIE begins to open her mouth to say something, AUNT BLANCHE puts her finger up.

AUNT BLANCHE

Not a word.

DELBERT

(Looking at the sheriff) They've got brains the size of, uh, walnuts, and that's, not very big, so they get a little... confused? Territorial, maybe. Anyway... So yeah... that's what happened. Just wanted to clear that up. I just do not want the beavers to be looked at in bad light considering they are so well respected around here.

BEULAH

Racoons and beavers-

DELBERT

Here is an envelope that contains a full report, as well as some pictures of said incident.

AUNT BLANCHE

Why thank you, Delbert.

DELBERT

(Producing a small form) If you could, please sign this, and I will turn it into my instructor for my final grade.

BEULAH

Oh, sure.

BEULAH is stunned. BUFORD grabs the envelope and sits at the table. As everyone stands, looking around at each other, now realizing that the fight they had was ridiculous. DELBERT awkwardly looks around, then gathers himself. Everyone is still quiet, to DELBERT, thinking they are in shock because it was beavers.

DELBERT

I know! Shocking, right? (Beat) Well, I must be on my way.

BEULAH

Oh, thank you Delbert.

AUNT BLANCHE

Yes. Thank you.

DELBERT

No problem ma'am. Please, don't be too hard on the beavers.

BRIE cracks up.

DELBERT

Did I say something funny?

BEULAH

It's nothin' Delbert. Thank you.

DELBERT

And sorry about your flower garden. It was lovely enough to be in magazines.

BEULAH

You just said a mouthful.

DELBERT stops at the door. Then...

DELBERT

I'm glad I could be of service. (Beat) It's beautiful here-- so much life, all different, all working together. Like a garden where everything's got its place and purpose. Feels like the kind of place you'd nurture a prized garden. Waking up to that every day... well, that's something special. You all are lucky. (Beat) You have a real nice evenin' now.

BEULAH

Good luck on your...(She's shocked she has to put the next 2 words together) Beaver final...i guess.(He knods)

They all stand there in stunned silence. BEULAH looks at everyone.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, each and every one of them burst out laughing.

AUNT BLANCHE

Well? I couldn't have put it any better. Even the best gardens need a little mess to bloom!

BEULAH

I guess they do!

SNACKCAKE

Beavers?!

BEULAH

I feel so foolish!

SNACKCAKE

A turf war? Why, I never-

THELSIE

And racoons?! Don't forget about the raccoons. See I told ya'll it wasn't me!

BEULAH

Oh my goodness. You all!

They all rush into a tangled, tearful group hug, talking over one another with a chorus of "I'm so sorry!" and "No, I'm sorry!" The SHERIFF awkwardly steps forward, arms half-open, hoping for an invitation—then freezes as everyone turns to look at him. He clears his throat, pretends to smooth his uniform, and slowly lowers his arms.

SHERIFF

(Looking pitiful) Well. I guess I should head out.

AUNT BLANCHE

Don't rush off too quick now, Sheriff—wouldn't want you pullin' a muscle NOT doin' your job.

They watch him walk pathetically to the door. Then...

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh, come here you big lug.

They all hug again, and include the SHERIFF.

AUNT BLANCHE CONT'D

(To sheriff) I know you mean well, even if your detective work is as through as a quick glance at a weather forecast.

SHERIFF

I appreciate that. Well guess my work here is done, whatever it was. Good day ladies, Buford, Tommy...

They all say "bye!" SHERIFF exits.
There is a moment. Then—

BEULAH

You made a beautiful Prom Queen.

SNACKCAKE

She sure did. It's a shame the crown's the only thing that aged well.

THELSIE

If I wasn't feeling so damn warm and fuzzy on the inside,
I'd remind you that that your hair looks like an eagle made
a nest in it!!

SNACKCAKE

(SQUEALS in shock) ?!

They laugh and hug.

For the last little bit, TOMMY and
BRIE have been talking in the
background.

BRIE

Everybody! I know we have just been through a lot, but-

BEULAH

Oh God, Brie, I can't take much more!

BRIE

There is something that we need to talk about.

AUNT BLANCHE

Are you ok?

BRIE

I'm fine. But I think a Tommy needs to make an announcement.

THELSIE

Oh, it's about time. (She grabs her MARTINI) This is gonna
be good. (she thinks she knows)

BEULAH

Is this true? You need to tell us something.

TOMMY

Yes momma.

BUFORD

Is everything ok, son?

TOMMY

Everything's fine. I just... I've been struggling with this
for just a bit, and I didn't know I was going to tell ya,
but... Brie has convinced me that you all will support me in
this.

BEULAH

Yes honey?

TOMMY

Everybody?

Everyone "yes!" Or "what?" or "ok?"

BRIE

Go ahead.

TOMMY

I.... um.

BRIE

I got you...

TOMMY

I ... (BEAT) Got accepted to Northwestern! Into their BFA in Studio Art, Full scholarship!

BEULAH

Oh my God! That's wonderful! That's terrific news!

Everybody cheers, hoots, hollers,
start congratulating him, hugging
him, except THELSIE. She looks
shocked. BEULAH notices.

BEULAH CONT'D

Thelsie? Are you ok?

THELSIE

Uh, yeah.

BEULAH

Are you sure?

They all look at her.

THELSIE

Well. Yes. (Laughing) Oh my God. You're not going to believe this. Haha. I thought... No. You're gonna laugh.

BEULAH

Thought what hon?

THELSIE

Oh, it's so silly, I don't want to say it.

BEULAH

It's ok honey! Say it!

THELSIE

Well... I thought... Tommy ...was going to say he was...
"gaaay."

She laughs real big. They all smile, and keep looking at her quietly, motionless.

She keeps laughing, they keep looking. Then:

BEULAH

That's it? That's old news.

BUFORD

Yeah, girlfriend, (snaps) old news.

THELSIE

What?! Everyone?!

They nod their heads.

THELSIE

(Looking at SNACKCAKE) Like molasses.

SNACKCAKE smiles in agreement.
THELSIE stands and hugs TOMMY.
Everyone keeps hugging, BUFORD,
TOMMY and BRIE are looking through
the pictures.

BUFORD

You should see some of these pictures.

SNACKCAKE

Is that raccoon holding a knife?

BEULAH

Sure looks like it.

BRIE

I think that's stick.

AUNT BLANCHE

It looks meaner than shit, doesn't it!

TOMMY

Sure does!

BEULAH

(Standing alone,
looking out, a small
smile playing on her
lips.)

Well, ain't that somethin'? After all the fussin' and hollerin', you'd think we'd have torn each other to pieces by now. But here we are--still standin'.

TOMMY

And still stubborn.

AUNT BLANCHE

Lord knows we've got more cracks than an old porch swing, but somehow... we hold.

SNACKCAKE

We fight—sure we do. What family doesn't? We've got our quirks, our tempers—

THELSIE

—and monstrous children—

SNACKCAKE

PLPLPLP!

BUFORD

We got our messes, and sometimes they feel too big to clean up. But when the dust settles, when the noise dies down, we've still got one thing that don't ever break—we got us.

BRIE

You all really are a family.

AUNT BLANCHE

And you're part of it now, sugar.

They all look at THELSIE, awaiting her turn.

THELSIE

What the hell are we, the Walton's? Geesh— Yes. We're a family. And like Snackcake even told me "if not by blood, by clan. (Beat) And as far as assholes go, ya'll are my favorites.

A moment of reflection. Just then, the air conditioner kicks on.

BEULAH CONT'D

Oh my! Did you hear it? It just kicked on! The AC... It's fixed! Feel the cool air?

AUNT BLANCHE

Oh that's nice!

She yells out the door.

BEULAH

Oh, hey! Thanks Buck!

We hear a "honk-honk!"

A moment.

BEULAH looks towards where the keys hang.

BEULAH

Tommy?

TOMMY

Yes ma'am?

BEULAH

Please tell me you got the keys to the Continental.

A beat.

A CAR STARTS outside. Tires SCREECH.

SNACKCAKE

BOBBY DWAYNE! Oh sweet Jesus—STOP IT! Put it in park! Don't you—oh lord, the baby's steering! BOBBY DWAYNE!!!

THELSIE

Snackcake! That boy ain't right!

SNACKCAKE

(As they run out the door) You don't think I don't know that!

AUNT BLANCHE

Well, I'm glad we finally got that out in the open.

Another SCREECH. Everyone runs outside—except BEULAH and AUNT BLANCHE.

BEULAH

We sure ain't perfect, are we Aunt Blanche?

AUNT BLANCHE

Not even close. About as perfect as a chicken with lips.

BEULAH

But we're here. And as long as we've all got each other, well... I reckon we've got everything we need.

She looks out the window.

BEULAH CONT'D

Oh my goodness—Snackcake's on the back of the car! Bobby Dwayne's doin' donuts! Buck's standin' there like he's watchin' NASCAR!

AUNT BLANCHE

And Thelsie?

BEULAH

Runnin' around tryin' to open the door-like a gazelle with a hangover!

AUNT BLANCHE

Ain't spilt a drop of her liquor. That's talent!

They sit. BEULAH pours a drink and offers one.

BEULAH

To Beaverton Proper.

AUNT BLANCHE

(Clinks glasses) To keepin' it lively.

BEULAH

I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

AUNT BLANCHE

They're special, all right-and I don't mean "rides the short bus" special.

BEULAH

The real *Prized Garden of Beaverton Proper*. Ain't that something.

LIGHTS OUT

ACT III - EPILOGUE

Lights rise softly on BEULAH'S kitchen. The house feels calmer now-a few new plants, gardening stuff put away. There's a quiet sense of renewal.

BEULAH sits at the kitchen table, reading from a thick workbook, highlighter in hand. She's on the phone, sounding proud and nervous all at once.

BEULAH

(into phone)

Yes ma'am, sociology! Not cosmetology-though Lord knows I could use help with my split ends. Split ends? Damaged

hair? You know... You know what, never mind. Life is real good right now. I'm doin' what I should have been doin'. I've got a new study-buddy at school. Named Delbert.

(beat)

Snackcake? Well, Thelsie and her opened a shop. Yep. Thelsie sells crystals, and Snackcake reads fortunes. I know. What a pair.

(beat)

Well, you bring your little fanny, I'll bring the coffee.

She hangs up, exhales, then smiles to herself. TOMMY enters, duffel bag slung over his shoulder, eyes bright with excitement.

BEULAH CONT'D

Well, would you look at you. My boy, all growed up, *adultin'*, packed up for *Northwestern*.

TOMMY

You make it sound like I'm leavin' for war, Mama.

BEULAH

Well, you kinda are. The world is crazy right now, and I just want you to survive it, intact. But I know you will. You always have. The world out there's meaner than a Facebook comment section during election season.

They both laugh. Beulah walks to a small vase, plucks out a single, perfect flower, cuts it close to the bulb, bright, healthy, and alive.

BEULAH CONT'D

Hold still.

She pins the flower to his shirt, tenderly smoothing it flat.

BEULAH CONT'D

You know, outta everything that ever grew in THAT prized garden--every rose, every weed, every bit of--**Pussy willow**--every bit of sweat and dirt--

(beat)

--you're absolutely the best thing that ever came outta it.

TOMMY

I'll just be two states away. You're gonna make me cry before I even hit the road.

BEULAH

Oh, don't you dare. I finally got my eyeliner perfected, thanks to Brie. We've gotten quite close.

TOMMY

You sure you're gonna be okay?

BEULAH

Oh, I'll be fine. Between my night classes, Snackcake's gossip, and Thelsie's three-martini mornings, I'll have plenty of entertainment. Besides, me and your daddy are doin' good. And between Aunt Blanche and I, we're havin' a lot of fun. I've been playin' *The Last of Us* (or, in the future, some popular game). Gotten pretty good!

TOMMY

(chuckling)

You're the strongest woman I know, Mama.

BEULAH

I know, right? I shocked myself just hearin' that come outta my mouth!

They laugh together. Beulah hugs him tight, resting her chin on his shoulder.

BEULAH CONT'D (SOFTLY)

Go on now, make the world a little more beautiful.

TOMMY nods, waves, and exits through the screen door.

BEULAH CONT'D

I love you!

Beulah stands there for a beat, then looks out the window toward her garden.

BEULAH (TO HERSELF)

Maybe some things gotta get torn up... before you realize what was really growin' there all along.

She sighs, and then sits back down at her books to read and study for class.

BEULAH

(Reading)

Let's see. (flipping a textbook) "Remember... "People's perceptions are their realities. Sometimes the only way to reach someone is to meet 'em where they stand."

BEULAH (cont'd)
 (Closes the book,
 thoughtful.)

Hmm. Ain't that the truth.

BEAT.

BEULAH CONT'D
 Though if Snackcake starts predictin' the lottery numbers,
 I'm gonna be takin' her A LOT more serious.

FADE OUT.

End of Play.