

# Merry Christmas Caper

D.K. Oklahoma





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ArtAge Publications  
Bonnie L. Vorenberg, President  
PO Box 19955  
Portland OR 97280  
503-246-3000 or 800-858-4998  
[bonniev@seniortheatre.com](mailto:bonniev@seniortheatre.com)  
[www.seniortheatre.com](http://www.seniortheatre.com)

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## **Merry Christmas Caper**

**By**

**D.K. Oklahoma**

### **CAST**

**R.A. THOMPSON:** (45), Director of the Senior Center, pompous and patronizing. A man, but the role very easily could be played by a woman. R.A. feels vastly superior to the older adults he/she helps. A two-faced political appointee who wants to keep everything simple to make his/her job easier.

**MISS LUCY JONES:** (80) Wears her glasses on a chain and a comfy, bright pant suit. Has a feisty manner and hearty voice. She is cheery and spunky, ready to fight the world if needed. Uses a lightweight walker.

**SHIRLEY GREENCASTLE:** (60-65) A widow who wears nice jewelry; low heels and hose and a nice dress, very attractive. Very naïve and a bit of a snob but likable. Lonely but doesn't know what to do about it. Devoted to the memory of her dear late hubby.

**BONNIE WEST:** (68) Dresses casually in slacks and sneakers. A warm-hearted lady, very likable. She is excitable and opinionated on certain subjects, like runaways and lawyers, but sweet natured and basically generous.

**FEATHER WINDSONG:** (72) Former Hippie who re-named herself. She happily recalls her past glory days and continues to wear long print skirts, sandals, and beads. She is devoted to causes. She is very frank and open about all things of a sexual nature. (Her real name is Ladonna Johnson from Big Bow, Okla.)

**HAROLD X. HORTON:** (65) custodian at the center. A nice looking, kindly bachelor, he has his eye on Shirley, although they are an unlikely couple; she is dressy he wears work clothing and a neat shirt. His manners are courtly.

**RICHARD B. DAWSON:** (65) Delivery volunteer for Meals on Wheels. He is about a former military man. Kind hearted, likable, a can-do kind of guy with a secret.

**MARIA CHRISTIANO:** (20) Frightened, pregnant and dressed in lightweight clothing. She is very pretty and sweetly innocent.

**VICTOR CHRISTIANO:** (20) Maria's husband, very protective of her; innocent, resourceful and quick. Wears jeans and a shirt. Good looking and sweet.

### TIME

*Morning. The present. Minutes before the regular gathering of senior ladies who make little blankets and stuffed toys for children in custody at the Juvenile Detention Center. It is a few days before Christmas, just before the Senior Center will shut down for the holidays. Assorted Holiday decorations in the room indicate the season.*

### SETTING

*Senior Citizen Center sewing room. There is a long worktable angled near Center. There are five or six chairs. There are smaller areas for sewing materials, with perhaps a storage cabinet and 2 other small tables or a book case for storage along the walls. Nearby is a sewing machine and an ironing board with an iron.*

*Two doors lead off stage; one Upstage Center and one at Right. The upstage exit leads to a hallway, the other to the another room. Also upstage is a small broom closet, with a working doorknob and latch. When door is open, the contents should be visible.*

*A colorful stuffed teddy bear and two partial bolts of nursery-print fleece material, one pink and one blue, are on the worktable. Each bolt contains enough material to be used as a makeshift shawl later. Also, there is a little vase of limp flowers.*

*In various spots, there are short pieces of material suitable for making baby blankets and stuffed toys, cloth, scissors, yardsticks, bag of stuffing, perhaps a cutting board or unfinished stuffed toys. Each woman will have her own workbasket or tray to carry sewing items. These should be cluttered and colorful.*

*At rise the room is dimly lit and empty. The door at Right opens, and Victor enters furtively. He quietly crosses to the worktable, looks around, and then picks up the two partial bolts of baby blanket material.*

*Upstage, garbled women's voices adlib outside the sewing room as workers approach from the hallway. Victor hears the voices and starts to leave. Then he hesitates and returns to grab the teddy bear. He exits Right, shutting the door behind him.*

*Bonnie, Shirley, and Feather enter via the door Upstage Center. They carry colorful sewing baskets, trays, boxes, etc. They turn on the lights and set up their spaces in the work center. Feather and Shirley wipe down the long table for the baby blanket-making group, chatting as they prepare the work area.*

**BONNIE:** I heard there was a fight at the pancake supper last night.

**FEATHER:** Bonnie told me something happened, but that's all I know.

**BONNIE:** You were there, Shirley, did you see it?

**SHIRLEY:** I certainly did and it was a big bunch of nothing. Just the same, if that crazy Erika Best shows up around here today, I'm leaving! Fighting at her age!

**BONNIE:** Darn it, I always miss the good stuff.

**FEATHER:** What happened?

**SHIRLEY:** Erika got mad over some dumb thing and kicked Buzz in the shins.

**BONNIE:** She must have had a reason.

**SHIRLEY:** He asked her to get the tray of syrup pitchers off the new carpet, in case something got spilled. That's all.

**BONNIE:** She didn't hurt him, did she?

**SHIRLEY:** Heavens, no! Erika's older than dirt. Besides, she had on sneakers.

**BONNIE:** Well, that's good.

**SHIRLEY:** She fell backwards doing the kick. Jo Beryl grabbed her, or she'd have broken a hip. It probably hurt her more than it did Buzz.

**FEATHER:** Sounds like Erika's off her meds again. Remember last summer when she got mad at Daisy and threw her new knitting bag across the room? It's the meds.

*(Everyone nods wisely).*

**BONNIE:** I miss all the good stuff.

*(R.A. enters. The women glance up but mostly ignore him. Clearly they don't like the pompous director. He wears a rumpled business suit and tie.)*

**R.A.:** *(falsely jovial)* Good morning, ladies.

**BONNIE:** *(rolls her eyes, sighs)* Hello, R.A.

**R.A.:** Glad to see you already on the job.

**SHIRLEY:** *(not looking up)* This is our regular blanket day.

**FEATHER:** *(very cool)* Do you want something, R.A.?

**R.A.:** No, but I do have an unfortunate announcement. I don't want to alarm you, but it seems that someone broke into this building over the weekend.

*(The women are interested, despite themselves.)*

**SHIRLEY:** This building?

**BONNIE:** My goodness.

**FEATHER:** What did they take?

**R.A.:** All of the holiday hams and most of the other canned goods.

**BONNIE:** They stole our food?

**R.A.:** All but the canned collard greens and lima beans.

**SHIRLEY:** Well, that makes sense.

**FEATHER:** You'd think they'd take the copy machine or the coffee maker.

**BONNIE:** So, R. A., how'd they get in?

**R.A.:** Evidently, thru the alley door by the kitchen.

**FEATHER:** That alley is really dark at night. Was anything broken?

**R.A.:** Just the lock. Harold can fix it. We're lucky they didn't vandalize the place.

**BONNIE:** Well, stealing our food is bad enough.

**SHIRLEY:** Maybe they were hungry.

**FEATHER:** They had to be real hungry to want that many hams.

**SHIRLEY:** (*chuckles*) But not hungry enough for lima beans!

**BONNIE:** What's wrong with limas? I kinda like 'em!

**SHIRLEY:** Bleh. Taste like green chalk.

**BONNIE:** Did you ever try 'em with rice and salsa? Slow cooked with pork?

**SHIRLEY:** There is no way you can fix lima beans that will make me like 'em. My mother used to make me eat them. Bleh.

**BONNIE:** Sometimes, you got a closed mind, Shirley.

**SHIRLEY:** On lima beans, I do. (*She shudders.*)

**BONNIE:** A closed mind is the first sign of old age.

(*Shirley sniffs and ignores this.*)

**R.A.:** (*interrupts the rambling*) Okay, okay, ladies. I just wanted you all know about the break-in. If you notice anything else missing, let me know and I'll put it on the list for the insurance company.

**FEATHER:** We'll keep our eyes open.

**R.A.:** Well, that's settled. ( *rubs his hands together*) Now, will our little project be finished on time today?

**SHIRLEY:** Only six more blankets and three bears. We'll finish this afternoon. No problem.



**R.A.:** Excellent. This is going to look so good on my, er... *our* annual report. The Board is always impressed with successful projects. This year, the Senior Center has an excellent chance to make me.... uh... to make *us* look good. And right before holiday bonus time. Yes, indeed. Thirty handmade baby blankets! Quite an accomplishment.

**FEATHER:** And thirty little teddy bears, don't forget.

**R.A.:** And thirty little bears for the dear tots.

**FEATHER:** Someone has to think about those poor kids. It's almost Christmas.

**BONNIE:** It's not their fault that their parents got into trouble.

**SHIRLEY:** A nice warm blanket and a teddy bear are a real comfort, even to the older children. You should see them hang onto those bears.

**BONNIE:** (*nodding wisely*) Oh, well, you know, big kids are just little kids when trouble comes along.

**R.A.:** Yes, indeed. So I'll just get out of your way for now. Carry on, ladies!

(*R.A. struts out, shutting the door behind him.*)

**BONNIE:** (*mimics*) Carry on, ladies!

**FEATHER:** I can't stand that man! I wish he'd get out of our way. Permanently!

**SHIRLEY:** Shhhhh.

**FEATHER:** We do all the work, and he takes all the credit! A total establishment creep. You can't trust any of them.

**SHIRLEY:** We know how you feel, dear, but keep your voice down. R.A. could take away your privileges here.

**BONNIE:** Like he did Henry, just for smoking behind the garage

**SHIRLEY:** And Rachel, for forgetting to turn out the lights in the ceramic room. Now they can't come to the center any more, even for lunch.

**FEATHER:** I wish he'd quit.

**SHIRLEY:** He'll never give up an easy job like this.

**BONNIE:** People sure don't come around like they used to. This place used to be packed all week long. Now we're almost the only regulars left.

**FEATHER:** R.A.'s just your typical stinkin' bureaucratic pig, bloated with minor authority. I've seen dozens of them. They screw up everything you want to do if they get the chance.

**BONNIE:** Remember your blood pressure, dear.

**SHIRLEY:** (*changing the subject*) Is Lucy coming in today?

**FEATHER:** If her knee's not acting up.

**BONNIE:** Now, she's a pistol. The way she gets around with that little walker! Clumpity, clumpity, clump. I heard she even goes on nature hikes with it.

**SHIRLEY:** Yeah, well, just wait. That'll be you or me one, of these days.

**BONNIE:** Not me! I got the family secret for good bones. Eat five hot peppers every day, and you keep the doc away! My mother lived to 97, and I'm gonna beat her.

**SHIRLEY:** My mother swore by cod liver oil. I take a big spoonful every day.

**FEATHER:** I drink three cups of herbal tea every day. Arnica montana and green tea with rose hips for Vitamin C. Never ache if tea you take!

**SHIRLEY:** Yes, dear. We all appreciate your health tips.

**BONNIE:** Oh, yeah, we sure do! (*sarcastic*) Day after day after day...

(*Bonnie looks for more material on the shelves and other places.*)

**SHIRLEY:** Well, let's get these projects finished. Only 4 days 'til Christmas! Anyway, Feather, you know Bonnie is just teasing. (*To Bonnie.*) Shame on you.

**BONNIE:** Yeah. I was just kidding.

*(Women sew on the machine or iron to keep the physical action dynamic during dialogue as needed and appropriate throughout the following.)*

**BONNIE:** *(digging in the storage cabinet)* I can't find the new fleece. I thought we put it in here. *(searches the area for the material)*

**FEATHER:** I used up the little duck pattern, but there was about, uh, three yards of pink and some blue left over. Enough for two more at least. Check the bottom shelf.

*(Lucy enters, using an aluminum walker, which she parks along the wall. Her eyeglasses are on a cord or chain around her neck that has shifted so that the glasses are hanging down on her back, but no one notices this at first.)*

**LUCY:** Hello, hello, hello.

*(The others adlib their greetings.)*

**LUCY:** My goodness, is this all that's coming?

**SHIRLEY:** Yep.

**LUCY:** What about Rebecca? *(searching her pockets, sewing bag and purse.)*

**FEATHER:** She's got a cold, and I think Dianna's still out of town.

**LUCY:** Right, and Tammy's waiting at the hospital with her daughter. The baby is due any minute, so that just leaves us to finish up.

**SHIRLEY:** We can do it. No problem.

*(Bonnie gives up looking for the cloth and gets something else to work on, which she will iron during the following.)*

**FEATHER:** *(fondly remembering)* So Tamara's gonna have a new grandbaby for Christmas. That lucky duck.

**BONNIE:** Lucky daughter, too. Gettin' to have her baby in a hospital. I just loved havin' a baby in the hospital. It was the only vacation I ever got!

**SHIRLEY:** You're kidding!

**BONNIE:** No, I am not. Six times, I got served breakfast in bed. Six years in a row. I would've had more kids, just to get waited on once in a while, but it was sort of counter-productive after the fourth one.

*(The ladies groan and chuckle in sympathy.)*

**FEATHER:** I was living in a commune outside of San Diego when I had my babies. All four of them were born right there, with a Native American midwife and all our friends gathered around for the Birthing Party.

**SHIRLEY:** *(amazed)* You mean, a real birthday *party* party?

**FEATHER:** Sure. Only not birthday. *Birthing!* We had a band and—

**SHIRLEY:** Wait a minute!

**LUCY:** You had a what?

**FEATHER:** We had a band. *(modestly)* Well, sometimes just a couple of guitars and a flute. And Michael's bongos, of course. *(drumming on the table)* The rhythm always helped my breathing.

**LUCY:** *(horrificed)* Do you realize that Feather is saying that she gave birth with a live *band* playing! And a party going on!

**BONNIE:** She gets a band and a party! All I got was a waffle!

**FEATHER:** You're making it sound way too fancy.

**LUCY:** *(aside)* Fancy? How about crazy!

**FEATHER:** It was really very sweet and simple. Geralyn would play this soothing water music on her bamboo flute...

**SHIRLEY:** Water music? You mean *breaking* water music?

**BONNIE:** *(shudders)* On second thought, who wants a band? I'll take the waffle.

**FEATHER:** It was just regular water music. You know, like a happy little brook.

**SHIRLEY:** Uh...okay... (*shrugs*)

**FEATHER:** Of course everyone cheered and applauded while the baby was actually born. To bring it into the world with a warm welcome.

**BONNIE:** They applauded? While...? Are you serious, woman?

**SHIRLEY:** Wait a minute! You don't mean everyone actually watched!

**LUCY:** Oh, Feather, how could you?

**FEATHER:** But, that was the whole idea. Everyone was there to welcome a new member into the tribe. It was so exciting.

**SHIRLEY:** (*horrified*) Ugh!

**FEATHER:** (*shrugs*) Seemed okay at the time. Everybody did it.

**BONNIE:** All that cheerin' an' clappin'and bongo playin' probably scared the poor little baby half to death!

**LUCY:** I just can't believe you let everyone WATCH.

**SHIRLEY:** Neither can I! It's too personal. Ooooooh!

(*Lucy, Bonnie, and Shirley press their knees tightly together, wincing at the thought.*)

**BONNIE:** Ooo-oo!

**FEATHER:** And after the birth, everyone sat down on our big Navajo rug with us for a welcome to the world dinner. Or in little Rainbow Renee's case, a welcome-to-the-world-brunch.

**LUCY:** Okay, let's talk about food. What did you eat at this, uh, birthing party?

**SHIRLEY:** Yeah, what goes good with labor pains?

**LUCY:** Anesthetic! (*The three nudge each other, wisely*)

**FEATHER:** (*unfazed*) Our customary pizza. Vegetarian of course.

**LUCY:** Vegetarian pizza! Why did I ask?

**FEATHER:** It was a tradition in the commune to have pizzas for a birthing . Whole wheat topped with goat cheese and symbolic tomato sauce.

**LUCY:** Symbolic tomato sauce? (*gets the image*) Oh. Ugh.

**SHIRLEY:** Oo-oo!

**BONNIE:** Yuck!

**FEATHER:** Oh, no. It was wonderful. Then everyone chanted the *new life* song, and after that we all ate a piece of the ceremonial pizza, to signify tribal unity.

**LUCY:** This is the strangest thing I ever heard.

**SHIRLEY:** So, where did you actually GET these pizzas, or were they delivered by a midwife, too? Midnight Midwife Pizza Delivery? (*laughs*) Thirty minutes or it's free!

(*The others laugh, too.*)

**BONNIE:** Of course, the baby delivery may take longer!

**LUCY:** But you get Extra Pepperoni if it's twins!

**FEATHER:** (*matter-of-factly; sweet*) I made the pizzas, Shirley. The new mother always prepared the Birthing Party food to symbolize her Glorious Harvest.

(*They all groan again.*)

**SHIRLEY:** I had no idea civilized people did such things.

**BONNIE:** They were hippies, man, not *civilized*.

**FEATHER:** Really, it was no big deal. What we did was merely symbolic. In some cultures they use a fire pit and roast the actual plac—

**SHIRLEY:** Whoa! That's enough, Feather. I'm sure it's a very interesting story, but I really can't take any more of your stories today. Let's just have a nice cookie and get back to work.

*(She passes a plate of cookies around.)*

**LUCY:** Me, either, but I'll take a cookie. Thanks, Shirley.

**BONNIE:** *(getting a cookie)* These must be from that big bag I brought in Thursday. I just don't know where all the food goes around here. Even the canned fruit's all gone. And the leftover cheese.

**FEATHER:** I'll bet those robbers took it.

**BONNIE:** Oh, my goodness! You're probably right. R.A. said they cleaned us out of canned goods. I forgot.

**LUCY:** I was looking for some orange juice this morning, but the half-gallon we opened Tuesday was gone.

**SHIRLEY:** I hate to think about people actually breaking in to get food. We always donate free food to people in need. All they have to do is ask.

**BONNIE:** That's right.

*(Everyone nods.)*

**LUCY:** Well, now, changing the subject...We're all just dying to know, Shirley, what did you decide about Harold? Are you going out with him?

*(The women brighten up and lean in.)*

**SHIRLEY:** Harold? We-l-l-l, I'm still thinking about it.

**FEATHER:** What's to think about? Just go!

**SHIRLEY:** Harold's only a maintenance man. Sometimes he even wears overalls.

**FEATHER:** He wouldn't wear them on a date, silly.

**LUCY:** Anyway, he tells everyone that he just sweeps up here for the exercise.

**FEATHER:** He could be telling the truth.

**BONNIE:** Anyway, who cares? The man wants to go out with you! He's nice. So, go!

**SHIRLEY:** But my dear, late husband Charles was a professor at the university. He always dressed like...a professor.

**LUCY:** Yes, but he's been gone for years. I think you should give Harold a chance.

**SHIRLEY:** I do like his mustache.

**BONNIE:** He has real nice eyes and that foxy little smile.

**LUCY:** He's always watching you. And bringing you flowers.

*(They all take a knowing look at the slightly limp flowers.)*

**SHIRLEY:** Oh, those poor flowers were just left over from the square dance party.

**LUCY:** Who cares? It's still sweet.

**BONNIE:** Yeah! Flowers are flowers. Besides, I think he's macho!

**SHIRLEY:** Actually, he invited me to visit his little apartment so he can cook for me. He has a family recipe for lasagna.

**OTHERS:** Oo-oo-oo!

**BONNIE:** A macho man who cooks! If you don't want him, Shirley, I do! All my life I've been cookin' for other people. Harold wants to cook for you! Grab him, girl!

**SHIRLEY:** But... at a little apartment... it sounds so...so...

**FEATHER:** So intimate?

**SHIRLEY:** What if he tries to, you know... get fresh?

**LUCY:** Great! Just remember *everything*!

**FEATHER:** Tell us all about it, especially if you decide to get, you know...really intimate.



**SHIRLEY:** Oh, Feather. I'm sure he's too old for that!

**FEATHER:** Hunt-uh. They got little blue pills that work great.

**BONNIE:** How do *you* know?

**FEATHER:** I just do.

**SHIRLEY:** He is in pretty good shape. Those big shoulders.

**FEATHER:** Sex keeps you young. All the health books say so. In the southern rain forest, it's customary for widows to marry their daughter's husbands so that they can—

**BONNIE:** Don't start that stuff again!

**LUCY:** Where do you get those stories?

**FEATHER:** Cable TV.

**SHIRLEY:** Well, we've had enough weird stuff for one day. We were talking about Harold, nice civilized Harold.

**BONNIE:** You know, I bet he pumps iron, too.

**SHIRLEY:** Stop it right now! I'm not even sure if I'm going to have dinner with him and I don't want to even think about anything else or I can't possibly go.

**LUCY:** Now you've upset her!

**FEATHER:** (*hugging Shirley*) We're sorry, honey. I'm real glad you have a nice man who wants to be your friend. We all are.

**BONNIE:** We were only teasing.

**LUCY:** And *I* think you should definitely go out! I bet you haven't had a date in years.

**SHIRLEY:** Actually, I've never had a date. Not since my husband.

**FEATHER:** All the more reason, then. Go!

*(Lucy digs in her handbag, still looking for her glasses.)*

**BONNIE:** What *are* you looking for?

**FEATHER:** She's been digging around ever since she got here.

**LUCY:** My sewing glasses. *(She turns around to search the cabinet and now we can all see the glasses hanging down her back.)* I had them when I left the house.

*(Feather and Bonnie see the glasses, exchange looks and suppress a laugh. They point out the glasses to Shirley.)*

**SHIRLEY:** They're hanging down your back.

*(Lucy twists around. Bonnie helps her rescue the glasses. The others chuckle.)*

**LUCY:** Why didn't somebody tell me?

**FEATHER:** Because you lose everything.

**LUCY:** No, I don't.

**SHIRLEY:** Well, yes, you do, dear, but it doesn't matter.

**BONNIE:** Hey, I lose everythin', too. One day I found my new underpants in the freezer. Still in the Wall Mart sack. Stiff as a board.

**FEATHER:** How'd they get there?

**BONNIE:** Not a clue. Don't tell my kids. They'll say it's *old timers'* and put me away.

**FEATHER:** Guess we can't call you hot pants any more!

*(Everyone cracks up, including Bonnie who does a little shimmy.)*

**LUCY:** Okay, okay. Now settle down, girls. We're having way too much fun this afternoon. We've still got six blankets and three teddy bears to go.

**BONNIE:** Yeah. *(imitating R.A.)* Back to business, ladies!

**FEATHER:** Okay, but I can't finish this handwork. Somebody else is going to have to do the face. *(flexes her fingers)* My fingers are too stiff.

**BONNIE:** With all your health stuff? Eat a hot pepper!

**SHIRLEY:** And call us in the morning.

**FEATHER:** No, smarty. I got a little frostbite in my fingers at a Greenpeace barricade in Alaska. It was cold out there in that little raft, with the whales and all.

**BONNIE:** Now it's whales? And Greenpeace? You always gotta be so dramatic!

**FEATHER:** I've had a very interesting life!

**SHIRLEY:** *(sighs)* Let it go, Bonnie. Just this time. Let's get back to business. *(flips out a piece of blue or green material)* This piece looks real snuggly. Who wants it?

**BONNIE:** I'll take it. I like the color. Reminds me of whales.

*(Harold enters, and approaches Shirley nervously.)*

**HAROLD:** Hmmm. Excuse me, Shirley. Could you come out to the kitchen? I, er, need your help with... something.

**SHIRLEY:** Harold? Uh, sure. *(to the others; awkwardly)* I'll be right back.

*(Harold heads for the door to the other room. Shirley gets up to follow him.)*

**BONNIE:** *(stage whisper)* Go get him!

**FEATHER:** *(thumbs up)* You go, girl!

*(Shirley exits with an amused, flippant gesture. The women work quietly for a beat. Then Feather sighs.)*

**FEATHER:** So, what's everyone doing for Christmas this year? I'll work at the church dinner again, I guess.

**BONNIE:** My kids won't be here 'till the day after, so I'll probably just watch TV. Maybe It's A Wonderful Life.

**FEATHER:** Stay home all by yourself on Christmas day? No way, Bonnie, You come with me. We can always use more help at the church, and the food is great.

**BONNIE:** Oh, I don't wanna be in the way.

**FEATHER:** Don't be silly! The more the merrier! Everyone's welcome. You really don't even have to help. And the dinner's free.

**LUCY:** I'd invite you to my house but I'll be out of town.

**FEATHER:** You're coming with me, and that's final! They have enough food for a whole town. It's like a big party with a lot of relatives you can't remember.

**SHIRLEY:** (*rushing in*) Oh, my! We've got a big problem!

**LUCY:** What's going on?

**FEATHER:** Won't Harold take no for an answer?

**SHIRLEY:** Oh, forget that! This is much more serious!

**BONNIE:** What is it?

**SHIRLEY:** Harold just found two people hiding in the attic.

**FEATHER:** What attic?

**SHIRLEY:** Our attic. Right upstairs! (*points*)

**LUCY:** When?

**SHIRLEY:** Just a few minutes ago.

**FEATHER:** (*gasps*) Oh! It's probably the robbers!

**LUCY:** Why would they hide at the scene of the crime? That's crazy.

**SHIRLEY:** No, no. They're homeless people and they've been hiding out in our attic.

**LUCY:** Homeless people are the robbers?

**BONNIE:** Wait a minute! I don't like those homeless. They're all drunks or worse. They scare me.

**SHIRLEY:** Bonnie, relax. It's just a young couple. They're kids.

**BONNIE:** That's worse. Probably runaways! I don't even want to know about it. *(gathers up her things)* They're nothing but trouble and then you get sued by their parents. I'm leaving.

**SHIRLEY:** They're both scared to death. The little wife is crying.

*(Bonnie pauses to listen, but she is still ready to bolt.)*

**LUCY:** Why are they here in our center?

**SHIRLEY:** Evidently they sneaked in last Friday after closing time. They slept on the sofas in the meeting room and then hid in the attic after the place opened up.

**LUCY:** It must be an icebox up there with this cold snap!

**SHIRLEY:** They look pretty miserable, and the girl is obviously pregnant.

**BONNIE:** I told you. Nothing but trouble.

**FEATHER:** How far along is she?

**SHIRLEY:** *(demonstrates a round belly)* About this much.

**FEATHER:** Well, if she's that big, at least 6 or 7 months.

**BONNIE:** You're just asking for trouble. Call the cops, and let the city deal with it!

**FEATHER:** We can't do that! No cops.

**BONNIE:** Why not?

**FEATHER:** Trust me. You don't want cops.

**LUCY:** What a mess!

**BONNIE:** We're gonna end up having to hire a lawyer, and somebody's gonna have to pay him, and it's not gonna be me!

**SHIRLEY:** Right now, all we need to do is talk to them and get more information. We don't need a lawyer for that.

**FEATHER:** I can't stand lawyers. One of them stole my stash in Albuquerque.

**LUCY:** (*confused*) He stole your sash? Why would a lawyer steal your sash? I don't understand half the things people say around here.

**BONNIE:** I don't understand anything except we're gonna get in big trouble and have to pay a lawyer to get out. You just wait. Lawyers find out we're been harboring runaways at the center, and they'll come out of the woodwork. I know.

**SHIRLEY:** I'm going to see if I can get the young people to come in here. That other room is chilly, too. The poor little thing needs to warm up. (*exits*)

**LUCY:** Why would they come to a senior center?

(*Feather begins making strange movements, as if sensing something mysterious in the atmosphere. She dances around, swaying lightly, transported into a dreamy, mystical state.*)

**LUCY:** My goodness. Now what are you doing, Feather?

**FEATHER:** I'm getting a definite psychic message that something wonderful is happening, right now, right here in the Senior Center. (*swaying*) Can you feel the vibes?

**LUCY:** I dunno. Maybe. (*sways a bit; getting caught up*)

**FEATHER:** (*dancing*) It's very strong.

**LUCY:** It is? (*mimics her movements; without a clue*) What exactly do you feel?

**FEATHER:** I'm not sure yet, but this is a very powerful omen of some kind. Think about it. A pregnant girl at Christmas time; no place to stay.

**LUCY:** You mean, like...? Oh my! (*stops; stunned*)

**FEATHER:** Exactly! It is the season for miracles. I believe in them. Don't you?

**LUCY:** Miracles! (*whirls around; getting dizzy*) Oh, my! Yes, yes!

(*Richard enters, removes his gloves and flops down. He empties his pockets of some small Christmas packages and pulls off his winter coat and hat. A robust, hearty fellow, he is dressed in a flannel shirt, casual pants and heavy boots. Richard doesn't notice the strange dance movement going on. It now stops with Feather in a meditative pose and Lucy very dizzy, wobbly, and short of breath.*)

**RICHARD:** Well, what a fun day! It seemed to take forever to deliver my Meals on Wheels. All my people wanted to chat about the holidays.

**LUCY:** (*dizzy and distracted*) That's nice.

**RICHARD:** (*oblivious*) Of course, I don't really mind.

**LUCY:** (*pulling out of her fog*) You don't?

**RICHARD:** Just part of the job. All my Meals on Wheels people give me little presents during the Holidays. And snacks. (*He chuckles, remembering.*) Then they always want to watch me open them and then chat a bit.

**LUCY:** I guess it's part of the job.

**RICHARD:** Maybe the most important part. You know, except for the visiting nurse, I might be the only outsider they see for days. Look at this. (*He displays a used Reader's Digest with a number of colored tabs showing.*) It's from Nancy Minton, one of my favorites. Used to be an advertising executive, sweet as sugar.

**LUCY:** It looks a little...well...used.

**RICHARD:** (*chuckles*) It is. Most of my people are shut-ins so they give me stuff from around the house.

**LUCY:** Isn't that sweet! Who needs new, anyway? I always go to the thrift shops.

**RICHARD:** Miz Minton marked all the best jokes for me after she read it. She gave me some day-old donuts, too. (*displays another gift*) And take a look at this.

**LUCY:** It looks like an ashtray. Very nice. But you don't smoke.

**RICHARD:** Nope, but neither does Mr. Best, any more. He's another one I visit. He gave up cigarettes when he had to get an oxygen bottle.

**FEATHER:** I guess that one's a no-brainer, considering the oxygen and all. *(makes a gesture like an explosion)* Kaboom!

**RICHARD:** Anyway, he gave me this for Christmas. He said I should re-cycle it and call it a candy dish. *(dumps a handful of candy out of his pocket and into the dish.)* Then Mrs. Horton gave me some peppermint candy. There, it worked out real nice.

**FEATHER:** You can hardly see the little dent-things now.

**RICHARD:** This meal-delivering gig is the best job I ever had. Some of my people are real interesting. One used to be an exotic dancer. She's 86 now and still a hot ticket!

**FEATHER:** That's very interesting, Richard, but we've got a big problem.

**LUCY:** And an opportunity to do a good deed.

**FEATHER:** *(overlapping)* You're not going to believe this.

**LUCY:** Yes, you see....

*(Before she can explain, Harold, Shirley, and Bonnie enter with a timid young couple. Both the boy and the girl are wrapped in long shawls of the colorful nursery-print baby blanket material that Victor took at the opening. The girl hugs the colorful teddy bear that Victor stole. They cling together, very frightened. Bonnie closes the door behind them.)*

**LUCY:** Hey, that's our baby blanket material!

**FEATHER:** It sure is!

**LUCY:** And our teddy bear!

*(Marie hugs the bear close to her, protecting it.)*

**BONNIE:** Shhh! We don't want R.A. to hear us.

**HAROLD:** That's right. We sure don't want R.A. sticking his big nose in this.



**RICHARD:** (*indicates the couple*) Who are they?

**FEATHER:** This is our problem. All of us here have received a wonderful opportunity to do a good deed.

**RICHARD:** What *are* you talking about?

**SHIRLEY:** It's our sacred duty to help them. You, too, Richard.

**HAROLD:** At least until the third.

**RICHARD:** The third?

**FEATHER:** Of what? Now I'm confused.

**HAROLD:** Next month. The third of next month.

**LUCY:** Now, what are *you* talking about?

**BONNIE:** Maybe this is a sign from God. Miracles happen this time of year.

**FEATHER:** I agree. This is happening for a reason. My psychic message is very strong.

**HAROLD:** I don't know about a message, but the situation is really pretty simple.

**SHIRLEY:** They just want to be near a good hospital when it's time for the baby, but they missed a connection and ran out of money.

**SHIRLEY:** See, they were both working on this ranch out in the panhandle. Miles out in the country. Too far to a hospital. Then Victor's cousin got him a good job here in town. They hitched a ride with a seed salesman and got here late Friday.

**RICHARD:** I'm following you so far.

**SHIRLEY:** They get to town. No problem. They find the shop. No problem.

**LUCY:** Get to it!

**SHIRLEY:** Okay. The problem is the place is closed. Victor and Marie don't actually know the owner. They were supposed to meet him at the shop. He even had a place for them to stay in a little apartment out back of his house.

**RICHARD:** Which shop is it?

**SHIRLEY:** The auto shop at the end of the alley.

**HAROLD:** (*thinking hard*) I've never met the owner. He's new.

**SHIRLEY:** So the bottom line is the kids don't have any place to stay until the shop opens up again after the holidays. That's their problem.

**LUCY:** Well, finally!

**BONNIE:** So they sneak into our attic, and now it's OUR problem.

**FEATHER:** Ooooooh! I have such a strong feeling that this is all meant to be! We are destined to help these young people!

**SHIRLEY:** So you see, all we have to do is hide them until—

**RICHARD:** Why do we have to hide them here?

**SHIRLEY:** So they won't freeze or get arrested for trespassing or being homeless before Victor can get together with his new boss. It's simple. Just a matter of timing.

**LUCY:** Isn't this *way* against the law? Nobody's supposed to, like live in the Senior Center. They're not even seniors.

**HAROLD:** Actually, how bad is it, really? Like Shirley said, it's just a matter of timing. (*gives Shirley a conspiratorial hug*) You little smarty pants!

**SHIRLEY:** When the shop opens again, the kids figure they'll be all set. Problem solved.

**HAROLD:** So, Richard, you got the picture?

**RICHARD:** Yeah, I guess. But it could get messy.

**FEATHER:** Well, I think it's just wonderful! This is not the first time there was no room at the inn. This is definitely a sign from above! A modern miracle.

**SHIRLEY:** Oh, my! A real miracle.

**RICHARD:** It's not going to be that simple. It never is.

**R.A.:** (off stage) Harold? Harold, did you get the lock fixed? Where are you?

**RICHARD:** I think it just got a lot more complicated!

*(Thinking fast, Harold pushes the boy and girl into a space along the wall, gesturing them to be quiet. He puts Lucy's walker in front of them, and quickly drapes it with material. Shirley plops an empty cardboard box over their heads and drapes more blanket material over that, creating a peculiar bundle of lumpy material against the wall, in full view. Proud of their quick thinking, Harold and Shirley exchange a look of pleased approval, united in their little cover-up.)*

**BONNIE:** That's not gonna work!

**LUCY:** Be quiet!

*(Lucy threatens her with a pair of electric scissors, cord dangling. Shocked, Bonnie freezes.)*

**BONNIE:** Good grief!

**R.A.:** (off stage) Harold? Where are you?

**LUCY:** Quick! Look busy!

*(Everyone assumes a busy attitude. R.A. enters.)*

**R.A.:** Well, there you are, Harold. Why didn't you answer me?

**HAROLD:** Uh, er... what say? I guess my hearing's not as good as it used to be.

**R.A.:** Well, no matter. Did you fix the lock?

**HAROLD:** *(nods vigorously)* All done. Good as new. Come on out to the kitchen, boss, and I'll show you. *(He tries to lead R.A. out of the room)*

**R.A.:** Well...okay. (*Turning to go with Harold, R.A. sees the bundle of material against the wall, but doesn't realize it is hiding anything. He goes to the bundle, fingers a bit of the material and nods. The others react with horror.*) This is nice. Do you have enough to finish up?

**FEATHER:** (*nods vigorously*) Uh, sure.

**SHIRLEY:** Uh, yes, plenty.

**BONNIE:** Yeah, plenty.

**LUCY:** Don't worry, R.A. we'll get it done.

**R.A.:** Good. Well, I'll go look at that lock then I'm going to lunch at the Chamber of Commerce. When I get back we can deliver the blankets to the detention center.

**HAROLD:** Okay.

**FEATHER:** Good-bye, R.A.

**LUCY:** Ta! Ta!

**SHIRLEY:** So long.

**RICHARD:** Have a nice lunch.

(*R.A. exits with Harold. The others collapse. Slowly, the boy and girl come out of hiding. They smile timidly.*)

**LUCY:** Oh, my! Just look at them.

**FEATHER:** They are so young!

**SHIRLEY:** Barely twenty, I'll bet.

**BONNIE:** Oh dear, oh dear!

**RICHARD:** Practically children!

*(Marie shyly offers the teddy bear back to Lucy. Lucy starts to take it, then stops pushes it back to the girl, indicating that the girl can keep it. Marie radiantly. She pats her stomach indicating it is for the baby-to-come.)*

**ALL:** *(a long, sweet sound)* OH-OH-OHHH!

**BONNIE:** Oh boy, what a mess we got now!

**SHIRLEY:** What are we going to do?

**HAROLD:** Why don't you two young people introduce yourselves. For starters.

**VICTOR:** Yes, sir. I'm Victor Christiano, and this is my wife, Marie.

**RICHARD:** This is Bonnie and Feather and Lucy. Harold and Shirley you already know. And me, I'm Richard.

**FEATHER:** *(shaking hands sweetly)* Welcome children. Welcome to the Senior Center.

**VICTOR:** I hope you aren't mad at us for staying here.

**FEATHER:** Of course not. I'd have done the same thing in your situation.

**BONNIE:** Me, too.

**HAROLD:** So, Victor, you have a steady job promised, but the shop is closed and you don't know the man's name or how to reach him. You only know the shop.

**VICTOR:** *(nods)* I wrote the guy's name down, but now we can't find it. *(to Marie)* I'm really sorry, sweetheart.

**MARIE:** Don't worry, honey. We'll be okay.

**ALL:** *(touched by their sweetness)* O-o-o-o-o!

**FEATHER:** So, now what do we do about it?

**RICHARD:** Simple. Let's call the store owner, and get him down here.

**HAROLD:** I already tried the after hours numbers in the phone book. Got a machine. My guess is they're out of town for the holidays. The simplest thing is just to let the kids stay here over the weekend while the center's closed anyway. What can it hurt?

**SHIRLEY:** Everything they need is here, food, a kitchen, bathrooms. Even a TV. They can sleep on the sofas in the meeting room, like they've been doing.

**BONNIE:** They promise they won't make a mess.

**FEATHER:** No one else will be around.

**HAROLD:** That's right. They can be like center-sitters.

**FEATHER:** I'd let them stay with me, but I'm living at Shady Acres. We can't have stay-overs, not even family.

**SHIRLEY:** I've got exactly the same problem at Shady Meadows.

**BONNIE:** Me, too, at Shady Pines.

**FEATHER:** These places must be in cahoots!

**LUCY:** My kids would throw a fit if I brought strangers home. They won't even let me have a little poodle. After all the pets I let Curt have, and he never cleaned up after them or fed them like he promised.

**FEATHER:** We know, dear. You told us many, many times.

**BONNIE:** We're all sorry about your poodle.

**LUCY:** (*dabs her eyes*) It just wasn't fair.

**SHIRLEY:** That's right, dear. Not fair at all. (*back to business*) Now, if these kids should get caught, they will say they were desperate and broke in, so we won't get in trouble with R.A. for harboring the homeless. Or whatever.

**BONNIE:** Why, isn't that thoughtful!

**FEATHER:** It certainly is! (*to the couple*) Thank you very much.

**VICTOR:** You're very welcome.

**MARIE:** It's the least we could do.

**RICHARD:** Hang on a minute. We really don't have to do anything, but call the cops and let the city take care of it. These people, despite their nice little story, obviously broke in here and stole stuff.

**HAROLD:** I asked them about that, first thing. Victor says the lock was already broken when they came down the alley. They saw it hanging off the latch with the door wide open. That's why they came inside. It was getting dark, and they were cold.

**RICHARD:** And you believe this kid?

*(Everyone looks at Victor. He looks back, sweet and confused.)*

**HAROLD:** Well, yeah. I do.

**VICTOR:** It's the truth.

**MARIE:** It really is.

**SHIRLEY:** Oh, come on, Richard. Anyway, it was just a little bit of snack food. They were starving and besides she's pregnant. Have a heart!

**HAROLD:** Yeah! She's eating for two.

**LUCY:** But don't forget they took our blanket stuff, too!

**FEATHER:** Well, sure, but they didn't hurt it any.

**HAROLD:** The heat was turned off over the weekend. It gets cold in here.

**RICHARD:** I thought those blankets looked familiar.

**FEATHER:** Oh, come on, Lucy, it's okay! The material was donated for needy children in the first place.

**LUCY:** Yes! For our special Snuggle Toy Project. Baby blankets and teddy bears for the children whose parents get arrested during the year. (*She falters to a stop, realizing what she is saying.*) And that's... but... this...

**SHIRLEY:** Is practically the same thing!

**HAROLD:** (*giving her a sideways hug.*) Right!

**LUCY:** Okay. But I doubt R.A. will like it. He'll have a hissy fit and throw us all out of here permanently!

**SHIRLEY:** Not if he doesn't know about it!

**HAROLD:** Yeah? Well, exactly how do you expect to get away with it?

**LUCY:** Someone is bound to find out. It's a big risk.

**SHIRLEY:** Maybe we can say Marie is here to help us get the project finished.

**MARIE:** Sure.

**R.A.:** (*off stage*) Harold! Harold, where are you?

**SHIRLEY:** Oops! Here comes trouble!

**HAROLD:** I thought he went out to lunch.

**RICHARD:** He did!

**BONNIE:** What're we going to do with Victor?

**FEATHER:** Oh dear! We don't have a story for him yet.

**RICHARD:** I know! (*He pushes Victor into the broom closet and closes the door.*) Stay quiet, kid!

(*Feather pushes Marie behind her. Marie cowers, hiding her face. R.A. enters, carrying a white paper carry-out food bag.*)

**R.A.:** I'm back.



**HAROLD:** So soon?

**R.A.:** I was half-way there when I remembered that there's no luncheon today because of the holidays so I had to stop for a sandwich. (*chuckles*) I'm almost as bad as the rest of you. Forgetting everything. (*noticing Marie*) Who's this?

**FEATHER:** My niece, uh, Marie. She came to help us finish the project.

**R.A.:** That's nice. Hello, Marie.

**MARIE:** (*without looking at him*) Hello.

**R.A.:** Shy little thing. Or maybe (*a knowing smirk*) a little backward, eh?

**FEATHER:** Uh, yes. But she's a good worker. She can stuff the bears. Go in the other room and get the big white bag of stuffing, honey.

(*Keeping her face averted, Marie hurries into the other room, never taking a good look at R.A.*)

**R.A.:** Well, I'm starving. I don't want to eat on my desk where the year-end reports are... and you're using the tables in here. Where did we put the TV trays, Harold? In the broom closet? (*starts for the closet door*)

**HAROLD:** No! Uh, they're out in the kitchen.

(*His hand on the door knob, R.A. stops, leaving the door slightly ajar.*)

**R.A.:** Oh, okay.

**HAROLD:** Come on, I'll help you find them.

(*As R.A. turns away to follow Harold, the broom closet door slowly swings open behind him, revealing a terrified Victor. Head lowered and cringing sideways, he can't see R.A., but any moment R.A. could see him. The others inhales in horror. Quickly Feather slips over and to shut the door then turns away. The others exhale in relief, but the lock fails to catch. R.A. halts, fumbling with his lunch sack.*)

**R.A.:** Just a minute, Harold. Something is leaking.

(*Again the door swings open. This time, R.A.'s back is to the closet. He sees nothing, but*

*Victor is frozen in full view, hiding behind the big part of a broom that just covers his face. Again, the others inhale in horror, except Feather who is unaware the lock has failed again. )*

**R.A.:** *(mopping up the sandwich)* They always put too much sauce on everything.

*(Now Lucy edges over and again shuts the door, but again the catch doesn't work. Pleased, Lucy does not realize this of this and moves away, proud that she has solved the problem at last.)*

**R.A.:** I should've gone to the Porker Palace. Their sauce is thicker.

*Watching the door close, all exhale in relief. Then the door swings slowly open again. Everyone sees it, and they all inhale. Victor crouches in a frozen knot behind a mop, a feather duster and the broom. Dabbing at his shirt, R.A. does not see him. The others exhale. R.A.: wipes his hands. Hyperventilated, the heavy breathers slump into chairs, panting. R.A. is oblivious. RA. stops to dig in his lunch sack for a French fry. He could see Victor easily by simply turning his head, but he does not do this, still occupied with his lunch. The others, in horror DO see Victor and react. They can't take much more of this tension. Harold tries to save the situation by suddenly feigning a limp, as if his back hurts.)*

**HAROLD:** Uh, I was thinking, Mr. Thompson, could we get a little help for me over the next week or so? My bad back's been acting up again.

*(Shirley silently closes the closet door and leans firmly against it. Harold gives her a thumbs up signal behind R.A.'s back. He is proud of her. Everyone collapses. Harold continues to draw R.A.'s attention away from the situation.)*

**R.A.:** Extra help? Not at the end of the year? The budget is far too tight for that.

**HAROLD:** Are you sure? Maybe a high school student. *(He glances at the closet, obviously thinking about a story for Victor.)* Maybe part-time?

**R.A.:** *(shakes his head firmly)* Thanks to this robbery, we'll have to replace the canned goods for the Meals on Wheels program. The insurance never covers everything. We may have to dip into the city playground fund.

**HAROLD:** Take money away from the new park? Oh, my. That would be a shame.

**R.A.:** We have to find it someplace, don't we? Come on, Harold.

*(Harold and R.A. exit into the hallway.)*

**SHIRLEY:** I'll go get Marie. (*Goes into the other room.*)

**BONNIE:** (*opens the broom closet door and waves Victor out*) Come on out, Victor.

*(Victor emerges cautiously, holding a canned ham from the closet as if he doesn't know what else to do with it. No one notices this as Marie reenters the room with Shirley and runs to Victor. He doesn't know what to do with the ham, so he hands it to Bonnie so he can hug Marie. Bonnie is caught up in their sweet reunion, and the ham doesn't really register. )*

**MARIE:** Oh, Victor.

**VICTOR:** Everything's going to be fine.

**BONNIE:** (*to Victor, absently*) Thanks. (*for the ham*)

*(Victor cuddles Marie. No one notices the canned ham she is holding. Bonnie: absentmindedly puts the ham down on the main table, in full sight of the audience. Everyone else is watching Victor and Marie nuzzling each other affectionately.)*

**RICHARD:** Just look at that. Nothing like young love.

**BONNIE:** That is so sweet.

**LUCY:** Oh, we've just gotta help them. Think, everybody!

**SHIRLEY:** Feather, I suppose we could just say he's Marie's husband. After all, that would make him your nephew-in-law.

**FEATHER:** Fine by me.

**RICHARD:** But what's his excuse for hanging around here all day. R.A. won't hire him and he doesn't like visitors. He chased off the cook's boy friend, poor Gavin.

**SHIRLEY:** Gavie just wanted a little snack. We had extra food so Feather invited him to sit down, and then R.A. ran him off. It was very embarrassing.

**LUCY:** R.A. says if you're not a senior citizen, you shouldn't be here.

**RICHARD:** Maybe he thinks old age is catching!

**SHIRLEY:** If it is, I want a vaccination!

**LUCY:** Maybe R.A. would consider a husband to be an exception. If he works free.

**BONNIE:** Think, everybody.

*(She picks up the ham, examines it absently and puts it back down without really registering it.)*

**FEATHER:** There's a lot at stake for these kids. Maybe their whole future. And the baby's.

*(Bonnie picks up the ham again, then gradually registers what it is. She becomes alert.)*

**BONNIE:** Hey! Wait a minute! Where did this thing come from?

**RICHARD:** It wasn't here a minute ago.

**SHIRLEY:** It's a food program ham!

**RICHARD:** They were for the New Year's Meals on Wheels. I thought R.A. said they were all stolen. What's it doing here?

**BONNIE:** Victor handed it to me when he came out of the broom closet.

**RICHARD:** Victor? But, where'd he get it? Something's not right!

**LUCY:** The broom closet?

*(Lucy throws the door wide open and without Victor or any cloth blocking the view, everyone can see a whole stack of canned hams.)*

**SHIRLEY:** How did those get in there?

**FEATHER:** Those are the stolen hams!

**RICHARD:** I think you're right!

**LUCY:** Who put them there?

**VICTOR:** *(proudly)* We did.

**ALL:** WHAT?

**VICTOR:** (*proudly*) We did. Marie and me.

**MARIE:** (*nods, smiling proudly*) All of them. It was a big job.

**VICTOR:** But we didn't mind.

**LUCY:** The two of you...did this?

(*Victor and Marie keep nodding and smiling.*)

**SHIRLEY:** I'm so disappointed.

**HAROLD:** Wow. What a shame.

**BONNIE:** (*gathering her stuff*) Now, I am definitely outta here! (*exits*)

**FEATHER:** This could be a bad sign.

**RICHARD:** It looks like we may have to call the police, after all.

**VICTOR:** Police! Oh, no. What did we do?

**FEATHER:** (*shaking her head*) A *very* bad sign.

(*Victor and Marie realize things have turned for the worse. Frightened, she begins to wail.*)

**MARIE:** But, what did we do?

(*NOTE TO DIRECTOR. IF YOU WISH TO HAVE TWO ACTS, THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO BREAK FOR ACT TWO.*)

(*Miserable, Victor and Marie huddle together. She cries quietly. The others are disillusioned and very glum.*)

**LUCY:** How could you sweet innocent children do such an awful thing? I am so disappointed.

**VICTOR:** But I don't understand. What did we do?

**FEATHER:** Don't play dumb! You just admitted you stole the hams that were supposed to be for the Meals on Wheels holiday dinner. That's why Richard is calling the police.

**VICTOR:** Gee! Please, stop. Tell him to stop. You don't need the cops.

*(Marie cries harder and clings to him desperately.)*

**FEATHER:** Hush, honey, it's not all that bad. You just might have to go to jail for a little while! Been there, done that.

**MARIE:** *(howls)* They won't let us stay together in jail. We didn't really steal anything! Just some cookies and orange juice. I don't want to have my baby in jail.

**FEATHER:** Well, actually, no, you don't, sweetheart. I almost had my third one there, and I don't recommend it to anyone.

**SHIRLEY:** Will somebody straighten this mess out? This isn't right.

**HAROLD:** *(patting Victor on the shoulder)* It's okay. Nobody is going to arrest you.

**LUCY:** We won't let them.

**SHIRLEY:** Hush now. *(She pets Marie who subsides but still clings to her.)* Nobody is going to hurt you, honey. Don't cry!

**LUCY:** *(joining the hug)* Anybody who gives you kids trouble will have to get past me!

**MARIE:** *(clings to the women, sobbing)* You are all so sweet!

*(Victor joins the circle, his arms around Marie, his shoulders shaking as if he is crying.)*

**FEATHER:** Poor kids. Young and pregnant. Bummer. *(She joins the group hug.)*

**LUCY:** With such an uncertain future!

**FEATHER:** The present ain't so great, either!

**SHIRLEY:** And it's Christmas. *(She hugs them tighter and rocks them all (Harold hesitates briefly, wrestling with his macho, anti-hug tendencies. Then he gives in and joins the rocking hug beside Shirley.)*

**HAROLD:** It's a lot to deal with. Poor kids!

**SHIRLEY:** There, there. It's going to be all right.

*(The huggers rock in a big love knot for a moment. Then Marie coughs and starts to retch.)*

**VICTOR:** Ut-oh. That's her morning sickness. This happens when she gets upset.

**FEATHER:** Oh, dear!

**LUCY:** Watch out!

*(The hug explodes as the people back away to avoid disaster. Marie heaves. Feather hands Marie a piece of material to throw up in. The heaving stops. All relax a bit. Marie smiles in relief.)*

**VICTOR:** *(pulls himself together as the head of his little family.)* We're really telling the honest truth. All we took was the food we ate. That's all.

**MARIE:** That's all. *(She remembers the bear and quickly puts it down.)*

**VICTOR:** It was that other dude. He took lots of groceries, but we weren't in on it.

**HAROLD:** What other dude?

**VICTOR:** The other guys just called him Boss. *(to Marie)* Maybe we better get out of here, after all, honey. Let's go before this gets more complicated.

**SHIRLEY:** Wait! I thought we had it worked out.

**FEATHER:** Don't let them leave!

**VICTOR:** Just give us a head start before you call the cops.

**FEATHER:** Cops!

**HAROLD:** Stop! Hold on a minute!

**SHIRLEY:** We can't let them just leave!

**FEATHER:** She's gonna have a baby! Doesn't anybody care? She's gonna have a baby!

*(Lucy blocks the door to the hall with her body and her walker. She shakes the walker at Victor and Marie. This startles them and stops them from leaving.)*

**LUCY:** *(tough as a gunfighter)* Don't make me use this!

**HAROLD:** *(playing along)* Be careful. She means business!

**LUCY:** Just try me!

*(Victor and Marie stop. Victor looks toward the other door as a possible escape route. Harold takes a cue from Lucy and quickly blocks the other door with his body. Shirley jumps to join him at the door, staunchly standing beside her man. He grins at her. Together they stand united to block the exit, a wall of strength, pleased with their teamwork. )*

**VICTOR:** *(thwarted, sighs)* Okay. We're not going anywhere.

**MARIE:** *(shakes her head, sadly)* We don't want anybody to get hurt, but we really don't understand.

**FEATHER:** I'm a little confused, myself.

*(The door behind Lucy opens and bumps into her back. She steps aside and Bonnie enters, looking a little ashamed.)*

**LUCY:** You came back!

**BONNIE:** Yeah. I guess I did.

**SHIRLEY:** You just didn't want to miss anything!

**FEATHER:** Bonnie, they admit they hid the hams but say they didn't steal the food.

**VICTOR:** Honest, we didn't!

**MARIE:** Honest! *(heaves again)* Sorry. Bleeh.



**SHIRLEY:** There she goes again!

*(Lucy hands her a bit of cloth. Marie buries her face in it and heaves again. In unison, everyone leans in anxiously. She recovers. The others relax.)*

**VICTOR:** *(to Shirley, for the cloth)* Thanks.

**MARIE:** Yeah, thanks. Just don't say *(urph)* ham again. Please. I can't take it.

**FEATHER:** Here's the part I don't get. If they took all the groceries in the first place, why did they come back here to hide? And why did Victor just hand me the... *(glances at Marie)* ...uh, the *thing* from the closet? It makes no sense.

**LUCY:** That's right! We didn't even know the uh, *things* were in there until he did that.

*(Richard enters, grim and efficient.)*

**RICHARD:** They'll be here as soon as they can. The Dispatcher said about half an hour. I decided not to give them any details until R.A. gets back inside. He's out in the parking lot on his cell phone for some reason. *(shrugs)*

**HAROLD:** He's never here when you need him.

*(Victor and Marie hold each other. Marie holds her mouth, still fighting nausea.)*

**FEATHER:** Richard, we're trying to figure something out - if they did steal the, you know, the *things*, why did Victor just hand one to us? We didn't even realize they were in there until he did that.

**RICHARD:** Hummmm! Good question.

**BONNIE:** Let me take the kids in the other room so she can settle down where it's cooler. But, Marie, you better not throw up on me, kiddo. *(They exit.)*

**RICHARD:** Now, let's check out those things, uh - hams.

**LUCY:** There's a whole lot of them.

*(Richard goes to the closet, gets a ham, which he passes to Feather and Harold.)*

**RICHARD:** Here's one. Here's another one.

*(Feather and Harold stack the hams on the table in a short assembly line manner.)*

**RICHARD:** There's more. Here.

**HAROLD:** Keep 'em comin'.

**SHIRLEY:** Hand me some.

*(Harold stacks and the pile neatly. He winks at Shirley as they work. She grins back. Lucy just watches. When all the hams are stacked on the table, they take count.)*

**FEATHER:** Twenty-three. I get twenty-three.

**HAROLD:** Me, too.

**RICHARD:** That's enough for all our people and then some. Maybe enough for the Valentine's Day party, too.

**FEATHER:** What were they going to do with all these hams? Sell them?

**HAROLD:** Naaaah. Those two? They're babes in the woods. They wouldn't know where to start.

**SHIRLEY:** Maybe they have a whole gang somewhere.

**FEATHER:** Oh, I don't think so, Shirley.

**SHIRLEY:** But why would people even think to steal anything from a senior center? Most of what we have is secondhand.

**RICHARD:** You'd be amazed to know how much good stuff is donated to public agencies like this one. Typewriters. Computers. TVs.

**HAROLD:** Victor said the Boss took the food. Maybe there is a gang involved.

**SHIRLEY:** And all our other canned goods are gone, too. Something bad is definitely going on. Maybe a gang of grocery thieves just moved into town.

**LUCY:** But, stealing from Meals on Wheels! That's lower than a snake's belly! They ought to be horsewhipped!

**FEATHER:** The thieves probably knew we'd never let anyone go hungry - they knew we'd replace the food somehow.

**HAROLD:** That's much too sophisticated for Victor and Marie. Besides, they're on foot - how could they haul the stuff off? I definitely don't think they could do it!

**RICHARD:** I agree.

**SHIRLEY:** Me, too! And they certainly wouldn't stay around here to get caught.

**FEATHER:** Well, that's for sure, but then, who is this Boss guy Victor was talking about?

**SHIRLEY:** This stuff gives me the willies.

*(She throws some of the blanket-cloth pieces over the stack of cans, completely concealing them.)*

**FEATHER:** *(helping Shirley)* It gives Marie the barfs.

**LUCY:** And it pisses me off!

*(R.A. enters. The others react with dismay.)*

**R.A.:** Hello, all! I've just placed an order to restock some of the stolen food. It should get here in plenty of time for the holiday meal program.

**RICHARD:** That's good.

**R.A.:** *(rubs his hands together briskly)* It may cost a bit more this way, but we don't want to disappoint any of your little home bound people, do we Richard?

**RICHARD:** Nope.

*(R.A. sees the covered pile of hams and thinks it is a stack of blankets, ready to deliver.)*

**R.A.:** Well, well, well, just look at that! A whole pile of blankets. Wonderful. You did it after all - and early, too, I might add. Well done, ladies!

**FEATHER:** Huh?

**LUCY:** What's he talkin' about?

**R.A.:** Why, The Teddy Bear Project! Poor, dear old Lucy. You *are* forgetful. I'm referring to the bears and blankets for the children left behind when their parents get arrested. Remember, dear?

**LUCY:** Of course I do, you poop!.

**R.A.:** It's my favorite project! I'm so glad I saw the need and got things organized!

**FEATHER:** Wait a minute, mister. You did *what*?

**SHIRLEY:** This program was going before you got here!

**FEATHER:** It sure was!

**LUCY:** We started the whole thing, didn't we, girls?

**R.A.:** Well, perhaps you *did*, but not on this scale. Didn't I arrange for the material to be donated and get the sewing machine fixed?

**SHIRLEY:** *Harold* fixed the machine! Because I asked him.

**HAROLD:** It just needed a new belt.

**SHIRLEY:** You did a real good job, too!

**FEATHER:** R.A., the blanket material was already promised for the project. You just signed for the delivery!

**R.A.:** Yes, I did. But I could have cancelled the whole thing if I wanted to. I didn't do that, now did I?

**LUCY:** What? You wouldn't dare!

**R.A.:** Sometimes you people forget who is the director around here. I run this place. Not you. I decide what projects go and what projects stay. It's in my contract! (*He sees*

*Harold is not working and snaps.)* Why are you standing around like that? Don't you have anything to do?

**HAROLD:** Just taking a little break.

**R.A.:** Well, break time's over. Let's get these blankets in the van. We might as well deliver them today.

**LUCY:** No! Wait! They're not ready!

**FEATHER:** They need more work.

*(R.A. goes to the stack of hams, talking. He sweeps off the blanket before anyone can stop him.)*

**R.A.:** Nonsense, they're all nicely stacked. *(He freezes.)* What's this?

*(The other cringe and tries to distance themselves from the wicked stolen hams.)*

**HAROLD:** It's...ham.

**R.A.:** I can see that, man, but what's it doing here? It was supposed to be in—  
*(gestures in the direction of the kitchen)* Hmmmm.

*(The others have run out of quick cover-up stories. They look at each other helplessly.)*

**R.A.:** Well?

**RICHARD:** Well, uh.... you see... we, uh.... they.... uh....

**R.A.:** Where are the pretty blankets for the little ones?

*(Shirley and Feather weakly point to the few finished blankets and give up, hopeless.)*

**FEATHER:** I can't come up with anything.....

**SHIRLEY:** Me, either.

**RICHARD:** I'm kinda storied out.

**LUCY:** I got nuthin'.

**HAROLD:** Everything is just moving so fast.

**R.A.:** Somebody tell me what's going on here?

(The others look at each other and then with one accord, focus on Richard. They nudge him forward to make the explanation.)

**RICHARD:** Well, R.A., I'm afraid we may know of some people...who may be involved in some sort of...er, grocery theft ring. Maybe.

**R.A.:** People? What people? What's going on here?

**RICHARD:** We don't have all the details yet, but some person or persons evidently stole this stuff... these hams.... and probably the other missing canned goods, too.

**R.A.:** Well, of course someone stole it! They broke the lock in the middle of the night and made off with all our food. It's all perfectly clear!

**SHIRLEY:** Except for the hams.

**R.A.:** Well, yes. Except for the hams. How did they get in here? In the sewing room?

**FEATHER:** Oh, they weren't in here. We put them here.

**R.A.:** What? Who put them here?

**FEATHER:** Richard and Harold and me. A few minutes ago.

**R.A.:** They were in the kitchen at eight o'clock last night when I locked up. I distinctly remember that!

*(Unobtrusively, Richard stands to one side and begins to make notes in a little notebook while the others talk. The others do not notice.)*

**SHIRLEY:** We found them in the broom closet.

**R.A.:** Where? In the what?

**SHIRLEY:** The broom closet. *(opens the door and points)* Right here in a nice stack, where Victor put them last night. I mean right where uh, er... someone put them.

**R.A.:** Victor? Who's Victor?

**HAROLD:** Uh, er, uh, he's...one of the robbers. Maybe.

**R.A.:** One of the robbers?

**FEATHER:** Yeah. Maybe. Sort of.

**SHIRLEY:** We're just not sure!

**FEATHER:** He's such a nice boy! And Marie! She's his wife and such a sweet girl. She's going to have a baby. We don't think they did it. Exactly.

**SHIRLEY:** Bonnie 's taking care of them.

**R.A.:** Bonnie? Where is she?

**SHIRLEY:** *(points)* In the other room.

**R.A.:** You mean, Bonnie is in there alone... with the robbers? The actual robbers! Good heavens! *(giggles and twitches foolishly)* But, they, uh, they might get away! *(almost hysterical)* He-he-he!

**HAROLD:** They have to come through this room to get out of the building.

**R.A.:** *(giggles)* Oh, yes. So they do. The robbers. But...they might be dangerous.

**RICHARD:** Not very likely.

**FEATHER:** Besides, we're really not sure they did it.

**R.A.:** Let me get this straight. You say that the robbers are right here. In the next room? Now? They might even be dangerous so Bonnie is guarding them! Our sweet little Bonnie! The robbers are right here in the center! Ha-ha! For heaven's sake! Imagine that! Isn't that amazing! He-he-he!

**HAROLD:** We don't really think they're the robbers!

**LUCY:** They just don't seem to be the type.

**SHIRLEY:** Feather, they didn't even have a gun, did they? I don't remember a gun.

**FEATHER:** I sure didn't see a gun.

**R.A.:** (*verging on hysteria*) A gun! You say the robbers are right here, as we speak and maybe with an actual gun? Oh dear, I've got to make a phone call. Right away. (He exits quickly into the hallway, closing the door behind him.)

**HAROLD:** The young folks didn't have a gun, did they?

**LUCY:** I should say not!

**SHIRLEY:** All Marie had was a Teddy bear.

**FEATHER:** And we gave her that.

**RICHARD:** (*draws a small gun*) Well, they don't have a gun, but I do if we need it, so quit worrying.

**HAROLD:** Good grief! Now Richard's packing heat!

**FEATHER:** Don't tell me you're one of them!

**SHIRLEY:** Oh, no, Richard! Stealing from your own meals on wheels people! How could you do such a terrible thing?

**RICHARD:** Of course, I didn't.

**LUCY:** Are you sure?

**RICHARD:** Absolutely.

(*Bonnie enters, followed closely by Victor and Marie.*)

**BONNIE:** What's all the noise about? (*sees the gun*) Oh! Good heavens!

(*Victor and Marie throw up their hands. Bonnie looks around wildly and then hides ineffectively behind the door.*)

**BONNIE:** Don't shoot! I'm not one of them.



**VICTOR:** Don't shoot! We didn't steal anything!

**MARIE:** *(trying not to heave)* Oh, dear. I'mgonnahaveababy! Please don't shoot us.

**RICHARD:** Everybody calm down. I'm not going to shoot anyone.

**FEATHER:** Then why are you waving that nasty thing around?

**SHIRLEY:** Scaring everybody half to death! You should be ashamed!

**BONNIE:** I'm not comin' out 'til you put it down.

**RICHARD:** I'll put it down. Come on out.

**MARIE:** *(heaves)* Buulllehm.

**LUCY:** Oh, dear, she's gonna be sick!

*(Victor and Shirley go to Marie's aid. The others flinch away, but again Marie settles down and gives them an apologetic smile. They sigh in unison and relax a bit.)*

**RICHARD:** Now, everybody calm down. *(He puts the gun on the table.)* There. I have a gun because I'm a licensed detective. I'm on a job for the city.

**ALL:** What?

**RICHARD:** A detective. See. *(shows his identification)*

**FEATHER:** Let me see that thing! Those can be faked.

**BONNIE:** It looks real to me.

**LUCY:** Me, too.

**FEATHER:** I guess so.

**SHIRLEY:** But when did you get to be a detective?

**RICHARD:** About ten years ago. I'm semi-retired now.

**SHIRLEY:** Why didn't you tell us?

**RICHARD:** (*shrugs*) The job sort of puts people off. I just wanted to be friends.

**HAROLD:** If you're a detective, why don't you help us find the food thieves?

**RICHARD:** I'm working on it right now. The city hired me to find out who's been stealing from some of our community agencies.

**LUCY:** Wow! Richard's gone undercover in the hood! Wow!

**SHIRLEY:** How cool is that!

**HAROLD:** So, Richard, do you know what's been going on?

**RICHARD:** Most of it.

**LUCY:** Did you say other community agencies lost stuff too?

**RICHARD:** They did, indeed. Sports equipment and lawn mowers from the park department, medical supplies from the free clinic and even computers from the learning center.

**SHIRLEY:** So! There *was* a crime gang! Right here in this town.

**RICHARD:** That's right.

**HAROLD:** My, my. Stealing from the city!

**FEATHER:** If it's been going on that long, then it couldn't involve Victor and Marie.

**MARIE:** That's right. We just got here.

**VICTOR:** Like we been telling you. Marie and me, we didn't steal anything.

**MARIE:** Nothing, nada, nada, nada.

**RICHARD:** You two must have stumbled right into the middle of the last heist. When you moved the hams, you kept the robbers from getting them, too.

**VICTOR:** Hey, that's right. That's why we hid 'em in the closet so the crooks couldn't get them if they came back.

**MARIE:** It was a lot of work.

**VICTOR:** After we found the broken door lock, we saw the hams stacked on the loading dock, sort of hidden under pieces of cardboard with some other canned stuff.

**MARIE:** Victor figured the robbers were going to come back for all the stuff and the hams were the most important so we carried them inside. It was my idea to hide them in the broom closet.

**HAROLD:** You could have just put them in the kitchen.

**VICTOR:** (*shaking his head violently*) No. If the crooks did come back, they would check the kitchen again. (*looks proudly at Marie*) Marie said we should hide them for the cops so if anything went wrong, we might get off for being good guys.

**RICHARD:** Smart little gal.

**VICTOR:** Then we found the attic stairs and hid up there. We knew the robbers would be back for the rest of the stuff.

**MARIE:** It was really cold.

**VICTOR:** When the robbers came back for the canned stuff on the dock, they thought somebody else had stolen their hams. Boy were they mad! We could see them through the attic window. They almost had a fight over it.

**MARIE:** They used a lot of bad words.

**VICTOR:** But we got a good look at all three of them.

**RICHARD:** Counting the boss? (*makes a note*)

**MARIE:** Yes, sir. Counting the boss.

**VICTOR:** I know I can identify him if I see him again.

**MARIE:** Me, too.

**VICTOR:** So then we slept in the meeting room and hid out in the attic during the day, like you already know. Until Harold found us.

**SHIRLEY:** What a story! They saw the robbers and they saved the hams!

**BONNIE:** They're practically heroes!

**RICHARD:** It makes sense.

**MARIE:** So, you see, we really are the good guys!

**FEATHER:** *(hugs her)* Yes, you are.

**HAROLD:** *(shakes hands with Victor)* Very, very good guys.

*(Victor and Marie beam at each other. Harold gallantly offers Marie a seat. She takes it, hugging the little teddy bear.)*

**SHIRLEY:** What an adventure! Let's have a cookie. Come on! Everyone have a cookie!

*(Shirley passes out cookies to everyone. They adlib, thanks, etc. For a moment they munch cookies, savoring the details. Everyone is very pleased with events. The older folks stand between Victor and Marie and the hallway door.)*

**RICHARD:** If I can just get an ID on this Boss fellow, we can wrap this case up.

**HAROLD:** Do you think the kids can do it?

**FEATHER:** They both got a good look at him. And the other two as well.

**VICTOR:** The young guy had a long red pony tail and really bad skin.

**FEATHER:** That sounds like R.A.'s son-in-law. The skinny one who mows lawns at the ballpark!

**SHIRLEY:** He's always in trouble.

*(R.A. enters. He stops and frowns at the unusual group. His view of Victor and Marie is totally blocked off by the others.)*

**R.A.:** What are you all standing around for? Move aside.

*(The older characters move aside. Now Victor and Marie can see him. Victor points at R.A.)*

**VICTOR:** That's him! He's the Boss. That guy right there. He took the food!

*(R.A. blusters, trying to save his hide.)*

**R.A.:** What is he raving about? Who is this kid? Why is he pointing at me? *(slaps at Victor's hand.)* Stop that!

**VICTOR:** He's the Big Boss!

**MARIE:** Oh boy, he sure is.

**BONNIE:** R.A., you are in b-i-i-g trouble!

**RICHARD:** Victor, Marie, have you seen this man before?

**VICTOR:** Absolutely! He's the boss of the bunch who stole the groceries.

**R.A.:** What are you talking about? You people aren't seniors. You're not even supposed to be here. You're just causing a lot of trouble for yourselves. Clam up!

**RICHARD:** Victor, you're positive that this is the man you saw stealing the food?

**VICTOR:** Absolutely positive!

**R.A.:** Huh? What? He saw...but, how? No way!

**RICHARD:** Marie, was this the man you saw? Take a careful look.

*(Marie takes a step toward R.A., nods emphatically, retches and throws up on his shirt. NOTE: This is accomplished by Marie dumping a small plastic bag or balloon of water...about one half cup...which she has concealed in her hands on R.A.'s shirt front.)*

**R.A.:** Oh, no!

**FEATHER:** *(delighted)* I don't believe it!

**BONNIE:** She nailed him right in the belly. The big poop!

**LUCY:** Good shot! Right on target!

**HAROLD:** Hard to miss a target that size!

**SHIRLEY:** We shoulda seen that one coming!

**BONNIE:** Poor baby. Too much excitement.

**FEATHER:** Morning sickness is the worst. I should know. Been there, done that!

**RICHARD:** Well, thank you, Marie. Can we take that as a positive identification?

*(Marie nods.)*

**R.A.:** *(mops at his clothing, grossed-out)* Ugghh! Look at this mess! This doesn't prove a thing! You got no proof of anything, but the word of a couple of kids! Who are they anyway?

**BONNIE:** You don't need to know that! All you need to know is that they both saw what you did and they identified you as the ring leader!

**FEATHER:** Positively identified you!

**LUCY:** You old poop!

*(All laugh at R.A.)*

**RICHARD:** I've been on this case long enough to know that all the roads are leading right to you, R.A. This sews it up.

**HAROLD:** He's a detective, R.A.! For the city!

**R.A.:** Wha--what's that, you say?

**RICHARD:** We suspected that it was an inside job in every case. You have ties to every agency that got hit. Your son-in-law works for the Parks Department. Your daughter does the books at the free clinic, and your wife works at the high school.

**SHIRLEY:** That's right! I remember.

**BONNIE:** He's always bragging about them.

**R.A.:** Nonsense. We are a family of dedicated public servants.

**HAROLD:** Dedicated public predators is more like it.

**SHIRLEY:** A pack of thieves.

**LUCY:** They're all old poops!

**BONNIE:** You should be ashamed! All of you!

**R.A.:** Now just wait a minute! Except for the word of these, these people, you have no proof at all. They probably have a gang of their own. Investigate them!

**FEATHER:** (*pointing to Marie*) She's going to have a baby!

**R.A.:** Well, I had nothing to do with *that*, either!

**RICHARD:** (*picks up a ham and shows it to everyone*) See this symbol? We marked the last two shipments of food that came in for Meals on Wheels. The stolen things turned up at the very same supplier R.A. was buying them back from. He stole them, sold them to his supplier, who just happens to be his brother-in-law, and then bought them back with emergency funds from the city. They were stealing from both ends.

**SHIRLEY:** That's awful!

(*R.A. cringes.*)

**HAROLD:** No wonder our taxes went up!

**RICHARD:** That's why the Center didn't get the new van, too.

**LUCY:** Rotten to the core. The whole bunch of them!

**FEATHER:** If I wasn't opposed to violence, I'd really let you have it!

**RICHARD:** Same thing happened with the missing sports equipment and lawn mowers. We tracked them, too. You're going away for a long time, RATSIE!

**R.A.:** Where'd you get that? No one calls me that anymore!

**HAROLD:** Ratsie? What does it mean?

**RICHARD:** That was his prison name his initials spell RAT, so they called him Ratsie! Ratsie Thompson. Avery naughty boy.

**LUCY:** Prison? Then he's a real criminal?

**HAROLD:** But I saw his resume when the Center hired him!

**RICHARD:** Resumes are easy to fake, aren't they, Ratsie?

**R.A.:** So what? I made a little mistake when I was a kid and got sent away.

**RICHARD:** You made a lot of mistakes. You just got caught on the mugging charge. *(to the others)* He tried to steal a purse from an old lady in a wheel chair, but his pant leg caught on her foot rest. He fell headfirst into a wall and knocked himself silly.

**R.A.:** I did not!

**RICHARD:** Yes, you did. It's all in your file. The old lady nailed him to the ground with her umbrella until the police came and arrested him.

**R.A.:** That umbrella had a really sharp point! I always hated old ladies, anyway.

**LUCY:** I knew it! That's why he was so mean to all of us.

*(R.A. snatches Richard's gun and points it at them shakily. They freeze, drawing back.)*

**RICHARD:** Now, what do you think you're doing, Ratsie?

**R.A.:** I'm getting out of here. Don't anybody move! I know how to use this!

**RICHARD:** If you did, Ratsie, you'd know it isn't loaded.

**R.A.:** I don't believe it! *(Looks down the barrel and clicks the gun. Nothing happens.)*



*(Richard retrieves the gun from R.A.'s limp hand then snaps a new clip of bullets into the gun.)*

**RICHARD:** Now it does. Sit down. *(points to a spot by the wall)* Right there.

**R.A.:** On the floor?

**RICHARD:** You heard me. Sit!

*(R.A.: groans and sits awkwardly on the floor, a miserable bundle of defeat, his legs sprawled, head hanging down.)*

**RICHARD:** Just stay there, mister. The police should be here any minute.

*(The others cheer and applaud.)*

**HAROLD:** Ya-hoo!

**LUCY:** Way to go, cowboy!

**BONNIE:** Just like on TV!

*(Victor and Marie huddle together. Now the others turn to them.)*

**FEATHER:** What about the kids?

**RICHARD:** They'll have to make statements.

**SHIRLEY:** Victor will have his job by the third. Can't their statements wait 'til then?

**RICHARD:** I suppose so. I've got plenty of other evidence and lots of paperwork. But what do we do with them in the meantime?

**HAROLD:** I can take them home with me, Rich, now that I understand the whole situation. A furnished vacancy came open yesterday at my building.

**SHIRLEY:** I thought you just had a small apartment.

**HAROLD:** Well, I do. My penthouse is just five rooms, but I own the building. We've got a vacancy right now, on four.

**SHIRLEY:** You own the building?

**RICHARD:** He owns this one, too.

**HAROLD:** How do you know that?

**RICHARD:** *(shrugs)* I'm a detective.

**SHIRLEY:** But, Harold, why do you work here as a custodian?

**HAROLD:** For the exercise, like I said. And to meet nice people like you.

**SHIRLEY:** Oh dear, I've been such a snob.

**HAROLD:** It's okay. I like a woman with high standards.

**FEATHER:** What an interesting turn of events.

**LUCY:** If he's so rich, you'd think he'd dress better.

**HAROLD:** *(to Victor and Marie)* Come along with me, kids. I'll take care of you. Say, did you ever try Italian food? I've got a great lasagna recipe.

**RICHARD:** It's okay. Go on. I know where to find you.

**VICTOR:** Thanks a lot.

**MARIE:** Thank you.

**RICHARD:** Good-bye, for now.

*(Harold stops at the door and looks back at Shirley, holding out his hand to her and smiling. As if hypnotized, she walks toward him.)*

**SHIRLEY:** I always liked you, Harold, even before I knew about, you know, the penthouse and all.

**HAROLD:** I know. It's okay. Richard, the cops are coming. Don't let Ratsie get away.

**RICHARD:** Don't worry.

**LUCY:** This pooppy little Rat ain't going nowhere!

*(Lucy clumps her walker over to where R.A. sits on the floor. She pins one of his legs down ...fairly near his crotch...with the feet of her walker. She leans her weight on the walker, grinning with wicked delight.)*

**LUCY:** Just try to move now, big shot! I dare you.

*(Off stage, there's the sound of a police siren.)*

**SHIRLEY:** Here they come.

**FEATHER:** For once, I'm glad to hear that sound.

**RICHARD:** I don't think you better move, Ratsie. You might lose more than jail time. Wait 'til the news of this gets around. Nailed by another old lady! You'll really be famous in the joint!

**LUCY:** Come on, Ratsie, try something! Make my day!

**R.A.:** Little old ladies! Why is it always little old ladies? *(sobs loudly)*

**THE END**