



Ed Vela

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Norman Maine Publishing
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*To my Father,
the original dreamer,
who always believed
fortune favors the persistent...*

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Urning It premiered at the Jewel Box Theatre in Oklahoma City, OK on April 14, 2005: Brenda Williams, director.

GUNTHER "GUNNY" HAMMACHER: Tait Nelson

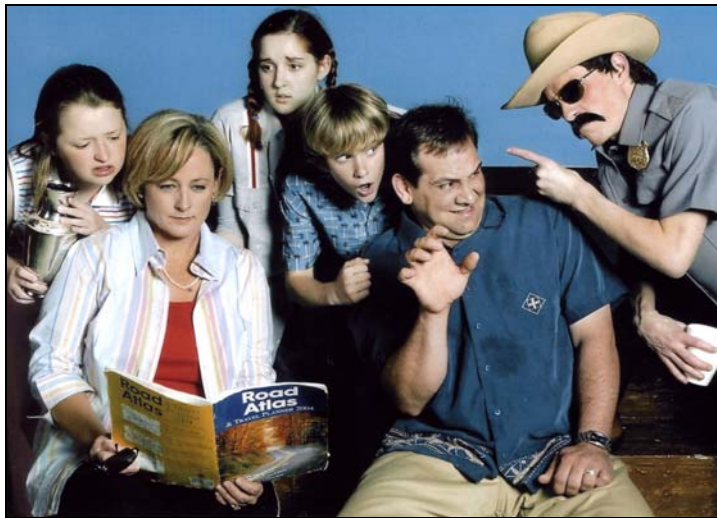
CHARLOTTE ANN "CHARLIE" HAMMACHER: Molly Dowd

WARD HAMMACHER: Morgan Brown

CALLIE HAMMACHER: Melissa Monroe

NATALIE "NAT" HAMMACHER: Kia Nelson

ROADIE: Dale Morgan



Urning It

Winner of the Jewel Box Theatre “Best Play of the Year” Award

COMEDY. Ward Hammacher has just discovered that his extremely rich aunt has died. To honor her last request, he packs up his family and treks 3,000 miles to scatter her ashes off the Santa Monica Pier and collect his inheritance. The drive proves perilous as the family experiences hilarious misadventures along the way—they get stopped in Texas, ripped off in Arizona, and jailed in Mexico. This family-friendly comedy features a minimal set and plenty of quick-fire wit.

Performance Time: Approximately 90 minutes.

Characters

(2 M, 3 F, 8 flexible)

WARD HAMMACHER: 44, thinks he's smart, on top of it, always right. He isn't.

CALLIE HAMMACHER: 42, Ward's wife; level-headed, pleasant, and the real power and heart of the family.

NATALIE "NAT" HAMMACHER: Eldest girl in the family; bright, mechanically inclined, a bit of a tomboy.

CHARLOTTE ANNE "CHARLIE" HAMMACHER: Middle kid; sarcastic, saavy, and a compulsive neat freak who would put Felix Unger to shame.

GUNTHER "GUNNY" HAMMACHER: Youngest in family and the only boy; acerbic, wise beyond his years, and a wellspring of useless facts culled from endless cable TV watching.

FUNERAL HOME DIRECTOR: Wears a suit; flexible.

MESMERO: Hypnotist; wears a top hat and cape; has a thick German accent; flexible.

EAST TEXAS COP: Wears a uniform and a helmet with a red flashing light; flexible.

SHORT ORDER COOK: Wears a chef's hat and a greasy apron; flexible.

OLD MEXICAN LADY/MAN: Wears an apron; flexible.

MEXICAN SHERIFF: Wears a Mexican federale type uniform; has a thick Spanish accent; flexible.

SALESMAN: Wears a cheesy suit; flexible.

LOS ANGELES LAWYER: Flamboyant; wears a magenta suit and a pink scarf; flexible.

NOTE: The roles of the Funeral Home Director, Mesmero, East Texas Cop, Short Order Cook, Old Mexican Lady/Man, Mexican Sheriff, Salesman, and Los Angeles Lawyer can be played by one actor or a combination of actors depending upon your casting needs.

Set

Urning It is a seamless, minimalist play. All that is required for the set is five chairs or stools and a small table.

Author's Note

The play is structured to be performed as continually flowing segments, not scenes. There is an intermission between acts, but all other transitions are indicated with lighting effects and sound cues. The action within the acts should never stop.

Sound Effects

Vacuum
Toilet flushing
Farting noise
Bell
Screeching tires

Collision
Moo
Thud
Cell phone ringing
Sad music

Props

Large urn	Butcher knife
Small golden bell with a handle	Tortilla griddle
Handheld vacuum	2 Lumps of tortilla dough
5 Chairs or stools	Tin cup
Small table	2 Serapes
Map	2 Sombreros
Greasy coveralls, for Nat	Papers
Baseball cap, for Nat	Large jail key
Dipstick	Pen
Hotdog on a stick	Cart or table on wheels
3 Toasted marshmallows on a stick	Arrowhead
1 Hershey bar	Gaudy turquoise necklace
Dollar bills	Lace hand fan
Tote bag	Hotel hanger
Gummi Bears	Plastic bank cylinder
Blue Pixie Stixs, or blue powder	Bible with "Holiday Inn" on the front cover
Dice cup	Rawhide necklace with two human teeth on it.
Score pad	Strongbox
Ashes	Cell phone
Roll of cash	Small key
Walkie-talkie	5 Cowboy hats
	Large belt buckle

**“Men don’t cry,
we just suck it up
and get ulcers.”**

—Ward

Act I

(AT RISE: Spot up on Gunny and Charlie, who speak to the audience.)

GUNNY: Aunt Gertie was dead.

CHARLIE: And no one was particularly sad about it.

GUNNY: Dad used to call her that wrinkled old crone.

CHARLIE: And that was when he was in a good mood.

GUNNY: She was my mother's great-aunt.

CHARLIE: And the only reason my father even let her come around the house was because she was –

GUNNY: Richer than Midas!

CHARLIE: When she died, my father thought we had hit the lottery.

GUNNY: We were her only living relatives.

CHARLIE: So it was a rather small gathering at the funeral.

GUNNY: Just Mom, Dad, Charlie, me, and our big sister Nat...uh...Natalie.

(Lights up. Ward, Callie, Nat, are joined by Gunny and Charlie, CS looking somberly into an open casket.)

WARD: She doesn't look the same...

CALLIE: No, she sure doesn't...

NAT: It's not her.

WARD: Of course it's her. They just made her look good is all.

GUNNY: She never looked that good.

WARD: Gunny, shush.

NAT: It's not her.

CALLIE: Nat, please. It's just the makeup and the embalming.

GUNNY: Why's she blue?

CHARLIE: Too much embalming fluid.

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WARD: Gunny, Charlie, wait outside.

GUNNY: Why?

WARD: Because if you don't, I'm gonna break my hand.

CHARLIE: So?

WARD: On your rear ends!

(Gunny and Charlie exit quickly.)

NAT: It's not her.

CALLIE: Nat, will you quit saying that?

(Funeral Home Director enters, carrying a large urn.)

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: Are you the Hammacher family?

WARD: Yes, I'm Ward, this is my wife Callie, my daughter Natalie.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: I don't care. Why are you in this room?

WARD: This is our Aunt Gertrude.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: No, this is Mrs. Horowitz. *(Holds up the large urn.)* This is your Aunt Gertrude.

WARD: What?

NAT: I told you, Daddy, we're in the wrong room.

WARD: Shut up, Nat. And go see what your brother and sister are up to.

NAT: Why do I always have to—?

CALLIE: Just go, Nat, while we figure this out. Besides, your father's right. By now Charlie could have Gunny rearranging the caskets in the other rooms.

(Funeral Director hands Ward the urn as Nat exits.)

WARD: *(To Funeral Director.)* Wait a minute. What am I supposed to do with this?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: I don't care. But I was talking to her estate person, and it was a stipulation in her will that she be

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cremated and her ashes spread across the Pacific Ocean just off the Santa Monica Pier. Happy travels...

WARD: Wait-a-minute! You don't expect us to take this, this, brass vase all the way across the country, do you?

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: I don't expect much from someone who couldn't even find the right room, but I do know that the final reading of her will is going to be held in Los Angeles in six days, so if I were you, I'd get going. Toodles... *(Funeral Director exits.)*

WARD: *(To urn.)* You witch! How can you still make my ulcer bleed from beyond the grave?

(The lights go down except for a spot, which comes up on Gunny.)

GUNNY: Dad started us packing as soon as the memorial service was over...

(Charlie walks into the light.)

CHARLIE: He told us to pack light.

GUNNY: And by the next morning, we were ready to roll.

CHARLIE: Except for one minor thing...

GUNNY: Nobody could remember what we did with the urn.

CHARLIE: Gunny and I thought we were the last ones to have it.

GUNNY: But with Dad yelling so loud...

CHARLIE: We both went blank.

GUNNY: We honestly couldn't remember where we had it...

CHARLIE: Or, what we did with it.

GUNNY: By the third sweep of the house and garage, Dad was getting more and more antsy.

CHARLIE: But, as usual, Mom came up with an idea.

GUNNY: Mom's brilliant idea...

CHARLIE: Was to try to get us to remember what we did with the urn through scientific methods.

GUNNY: So, we went across town to see Mesmero, the Great.

CHARLIE: Dad thought it was the dumbest thing he'd ever heard of...

GUNNY: And, for once, we thought he was right.

CHARLIE: But we'd looked everywhere for the urn...

GUNNY: And Dad was desperate.

CHARLIE: He really was...

GUNNY: 'Cuz Mesmero charged 50 bucks a session...

(Spot down. Lights up on main stage. Gunny and Charlie walk to two chairs set CS. Ward and Callie sit on two other chairs set down SL as Mesmero the Great, dressed in a top hat and cape, enters from the right and crosses to Gunny and Charlie.)

MESMERO: *(Thick German accent.)* Good afternoon, children.

I am Mesmero, zhe Great! Und I understand I vill be helping you to remember something, yah?

GUNNY: Yeah, right.

CHARLIE: This is a complete waste of time.

GUNNY: We don't believe in this hypnotizing stuff.

CHARLIE: Yeah, you really think you can hypnotize us?

MESMERO: Vell, zhat is vhere you have zhe wrong idea about hypnosis. You zee, all hypnosis takes is concentration, und imagination. You zee, children, I do not hypnotize you. You hypnotize yourzelves.

GUNNY: Then what do we need you for?

(Gunny and Charlie laugh, as Mesmero takes out a small golden bell on a handle.)

MESMERO: I act as your guide. Now, if you vill just look at zhis little bell, und listen to zhe zound of my voice...

GUNNY: Isn't it supposed to be a watch?

(Charlie and Gunny laugh again.)

MESMERO: Children, please. Just cooperate, for your father's sake. Zhe deposit is non-refundable.

CHARLIE: Okay...

GUNNY: Whatever...

MESMERO: Very good, children. Now, watch zhe bell, und listen closely to zhe zound of my voice...

CHARLIE/GUNNY: This is so stupid...

(During the following sequence between Ward and Callie, Charlie and Gunny at first smile, then become entranced as Mesmero silently hypnotizes them.)

WARD: This is so stupid.

CALLIE: Now, Ward. My friend Irene says that her cousin's uncle's wife's brother was a two-pack-a-day man before he came to Mesmero.

(Ward throws a glance over to Mesmero, who is hypnotizing the kids.)

WARD: What's he up to now? Four packs a day?

CALLIE: Ward! Irene says he quit altogether. Cold turkey. Thanks to Mesmero.

WARD: At 50 bucks a shot, Mesmero should've helped him quit smoking and mowed his lawn.

CALLIE: Ward, hush. You don't want Mesmero to hear you.

WARD: Oh, yeah, heaven forbid I should insult a guy who's dressed like Houdini's cousin's uncle's wife's brother...

(The kids have gone through closing their eyes and dropping their heads, and are now staring blankly, straight ahead, in a hypnotic trance, as Mesmero calls to Ward.)

MESMERO: Excuse me, Herr Hammacher.

WARD: Yah...I mean, yeah...

MESMERO: Zhey are under.

WARD: Under what?

MESMERO: I mean, they are deeply hypnotized. Youngsters are usually easier zhan adults, but your children are extraordinarily susceptible.

WARD: To you, and the Home Shopping Channel. (*Looks at them.*) What are you talking about? They look the same as always. Gunny... (*Waves his hand in front of Gunny's face.*) Gunny...? Whoa... (*To Callie.*) He looks as spacey as half the guys I went to college with... (*Looks at Charlie.*) Charlie...? Charlotte Anne...?

MESMERO: You zee? At zhis point, zhey vill only respond to my voice. Until zhey awaken of course.

WARD: Of course. How does this help us find the urn?

MESMERO: Oh, zhat is zimple. You zhe, zee brain is like zhe world's largest most complexed computer. Everyshing ve have ever zeen, heard, or done, is stored in zhe deep recesses of zhe unconscious.

WARD: (*Waving his hand in front of Gunny's face.*) Well, they both seem to be pretty recessed at the moment.

MESMERO: Exactly. (*He rings the bell and Gunny and Charlie slowly close their eyes and drop their heads.*) You zee, shrough zhe hypnosis, ve create a conduit. Build a bridge shrough to zhe unconscious mind.

CALLIE: How interesting. (*To Ward.*) Looks like you owe Irene's cousin's uncle's wife's brother an apology.

WARD: I don't even know Irene's uncle's brother's cousin's wife.

CALLIE: Cousin's uncle's wife's brother.

WARD: Ask me if I care?! (*To Mesmero.*) Look, Svengali, I still don't see how this gets us any closer to tracking down that urn.

MESMERO: Allow me to demonstrate. (*Begins ringing bell.*) Children. As you listen to zhe ringing of zhe bell, you go deeper to sleep. And as you go deeper to sleep, you go back...back in time. Back in time, children. Back in time. When I snap my fingers, you will be back in time...

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(Mesmero stops ringing the bell and snaps his fingers. Gunny opens his eyes, brings his knees up to his chest, and sucks his thumb as he looks around quizzically. Charlie, in a very little kid voice, begins singing.)

CHARLIE: *(Singing with hand movements.)* “The eensy, weensy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain, and washed the spider out...”

(Mesmero begins ringing the bell again and Charlie and Gunny slowly close their eyes and drop their heads again.)

MESMERO: Not *zhat* far back, children. I vant you to go back to...to...?

CALLIE: *(Soto voce, to Mesmero.)* Last night.

MESMERO: I vant you to go back to last night. When you vere playing vith the sarcophagus...

WARD: Urn! Ya dumb—

CALLIE: Ward!

MESMERO: Yah, yah...urn. When you vere playing vith zhe urn. When I snap my fingers, you vill be back in time, when you vere both playing vith zhe urn...

(Mesmero snaps his fingers and Gunny and Charlie instantly get up. Gunny assumes the position of a football center. Charlie comes up behind him as a quarterback. They act normally, as though doing a flashback scene.)

CHARLIE: Down...set...hut!

(Gunny hikes the imaginary urn to her and goes out for a pass.)

GUNNY: Hammacher jukes once, he’s open... *(Charlie mimes throwing him the urn, as Ward reacts in horror. Gunny mimes catching it.)* First down! *(Gunny flips it back to her, as Ward*

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reacts again.) See. I told you we could use it like a football.
It even spirals like one.

CHARLIE: Go long.

(Gunny runs out across the stage a little further, as he commentates for himself.)

GUNNY: It's third and ten. Less than a minute to go in the game. Hammacher goes deep. He's alone in the end zone...
(Charlie mimes heaving the urn, and Gunny mimes catching it as Ward reacts.) He caught it! Hammacher wins the game for the Jets. And the crowd goes wild!

(Gunny begins to do an end zone dance, followed by a very pronounced spike of the urn.)

CHARLIE: Gunny! What are you doing?!

GUNNY: Oops.

CHARLIE: You didn't have to spike her.

GUNNY: Well, she's beyond pain. 'Sides, that urn's made of metal. It won't shatter.

CHARLIE: *(Examining the urn.)* You broke the seal on the lid, stupid.

GUNNY: I'm not stupid. Don't call me stupid!

CHARLIE: Well, what would you call spiking your dead aunt? Intellectual?!

GUNNY: Look, we can Krazy Glue the lid back tight.

CHARLIE: Oh, like Dad's not going to notice that.

GUNNY: Dad's not that bright. He'll never know the difference.

(Callie stops Ward from going after Gunny, as Charlie and Gunny react as though hearing the same thing from off.)

CHARLIE: Uh-oh, it's Nat.

MESMERO: *(Soto voce, to Callie.)* Who is Nat?

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CALLIE: (*Soto voce, to Mesmero.*) Our older daughter.

(*Charlie flings the urn to Gunny.*)

CHARLIE: Hide it!

GUNNY: Where?

CHARLIE: Anywhere! Just hurry!

(*Charlie crosses to the opposite side of the stage and puts up her hands, as though trying to slow Nat's entry. Gunny looks around frantically, then kneels down and flings the urn into something unseen along the ground.*)

WARD: Hold it! What the heck was that?

MESMERO: (*To Gunny and Charlie.*) Freeze! (*Gunny and Charlie freeze in position. Mesmero crosses to Gunny.*) Gunny, when I touch your shoulder, you will unfreeze and stand up. (*Mesmero touches Gunny's shoulder. Gunny unfreezes, stands, and stares blankly ahead. Charlie remains frozen.*) Gunny...? Where did you just shrow zhe urn?

GUNNY: (*In a hypnotized voice.*) Philby's doghouse.

MESMERO: (*To Ward and Callie.*) Who is zhis Philby? Another daughter?

WARD: He's a dog!

CALLIE: He *was* a dog. He died about two years ago.

WARD: Like he didn't die a dog?

CALLIE: But they kept the doghouse in the back yard.

WARD: Like a shrine to the lousy fleabag.

CALLIE: Ward! Philby was a good dog.

WARD: Not to me he wasn't. He was always whizzing in my slippers, the son-of-a—

CALLIE: Ward! Enough. Anyway his doghouse is still out in the back yard.

MESMERO: Vell, zhat is vhere zhe urn is.

WARD: (*To Callie.*) No wonder we couldn't find it.

CALLIE: You didn't check there, Ward?

WARD: Callie, who in their right mind is gonna check a dead dog's house!? And, just how could these two little weasels forget all that?

CALLIE: Well, the way you were yelling at them this morning, I'm surprised they could remember their own names...

MESMERO: Yah. Often children can block out memories under stress. Especially when the memory is unpleasant. I will awaken them now. Because they were so hypnotizable, I doubt if they will even remember being under. Any requests?

WARD: What is this? American Bandstand all of a sudden?

MESMERO: Ach, nein, nein. I simply mean—as long as they are under—any bad habits you'd like addressed? Biting the nails...not wanting to study...?

WARD: Can you numb their backsides for a day or so? I'm sure they'll appreciate it once I get them home...

CALLIE: Ward! *(To Mesmero.)* No, no, they're just fine the way they are.

WARD: *(Under his breath.)* That's a matter of opinion.

MESMERO: Very well. *(Mesmero begins ringing the bell. Gunny closes his eyes and drops his head. Charlie unfreezes and does the same.)* Children, I'm going to count to five and clap my hands. When I do this, you will become wide awake. Feeling refreshed and wonderful. Von...two...three...four...five!

(The lights go out on the main stage, as a spot comes up on the side. Gunny and Charlie, with their eyes still closed and their heads still down, walk into the light. They stand there, doing nothing for a moment, then Mesmero walks into the light behind them, and claps his hands. They awaken as he runs off.)

GUNNY: Hey, I feel refreshed.

CHARLIE: And I feel wonderful...uh, I mean, wonderful.

GUNNY: Anyway, they say we got hypnotized...

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(They look at each other.)

GUNNY/CHARLIE: Yeah, right.

GUNNY: But we did find the urn.

CHARLIE: Dad resealed the lid...

GUNNY: By using the handyman's secret weapon...duct tape.

CHARLIE: So we got a pretty early start the next day.

GUNNY: Dad decided that flying would be too expensive.

CHARLIE: Because as he put it: "We don't have the old shrew's green yet."

GUNNY: So we drove.

CHARLIE: The five of us.

GUNNY: And the urn full of Aunt Gertie.

CHARLIE: On a road trip from Trenton, New Jersey to Santa Monica, California.

GUNNY: In a 1989 Buick Skylark, which usually has trouble making it to the Bronx.

CHARLIE: Mom decided on the southern route...

GUNNY: 'Cuz she said it was more scenic.

CHARLIE: Dad said he was less concerned with scenery...

GUNNY: Than greenery.

CHARLIE: And wanted to take a more direct route.

GUNNY: So, Dad said no. No way. No how.

CHARLIE: So, of course, we went south.

GUNNY: That's the way it always seemed to work out in our family.

CHARLIE: Dad would say no, loudly.

GUNNY: Mom would say yes, softly.

CHARLIE: And eventually...

GUNNY: It was yes.

(Chairs are set up to represent the family car. In the front seat, Ward sits in the driver's seat and Callie sits in the passenger seat. In the backseat, Nat sits in the middle, Gunny sits left, and Charlie sits right.)

NAT: Why the heck did I have to come?

WARD: It's a 3,000-mile trip, Nat. We need another driver.

You know your mother is night-blind. Besides you're the only one who can fix the car.

CALLIE: We're not going to be driving too much at night, are we, Ward?

WARD: No, but they say going across the desert you gotta get up early so you can do most of your driving for the day before it gets too hot.

CALLIE: But it's only June, Ward.

WARD: Yeah, and June in Trenton is fine, but June in Arizona is only a few degrees cooler than the center of the sun.

NAT: Early? How early?

WARD: Going through there, I want to be on the road by four.

NAT: Four in the morning! No way! I'm not getting up that early! *(Ward and Callie glare at her.)* Without coffee, I mean.

Of course I'll help out with the driving...through the desert...in the pitch, dark middle of the night.

(Charlie takes out a small hand vacuum and begins cleaning the floor of the backseat.)

WARD: Charlie, what the blitz are you doing?

(Charlie turns off the vacuum.)

CHARLIE: Eeuuuww, the backseat is disgusting.

WARD: You brought the Dust Buster from the house?! *(To Callie.)* It's bad enough she keeps her room hermetically sealed, now she's cleaning the back of the car?

CHARLIE: Gunny was eating peanuts back here.

GUNNY: Hey, I like 'em in the shell.

CHARLIE: Well, then eat 'em with the shell on! Don't leave the residue all over the backseat. Where do you think you are? Yankee Stadium?

GUNNY: Don't I wish! *(Charlie switches the vacuum back on and begins cleaning the floor then starts to go over Gunny's lap.)*
(Yells over the sound of the vacuum.) Dad! She's vacuuming my pants!!

WARD: *(Yells.)* Charlie! Could you turn that—?! *(She continues to vacuum. Yells louder.)* Charlie! Turn the—! *(She continues to vacuum. Yells even louder.)* Charlie! Turn that G-darn thing off!

(Charlie turns off the vacuum.)

CHARLIE: Sorry, Dad. Did you say something?

WARD: No, I screamed something. Put the Dust Buster away, will ya?

CHARLIE: But, Dad, it's a mess back here—

WARD: Charlie?! Quiet now. Clean later.

GUNNY: *(To Charlie.)* See? Even Dad thinks you're a freak.

WARD: I do not think she's a freak...much.

CHARLIE: Just because you're a slob, Gunny...

(For the following exchange between Gunny and Charlie, Nat flips her head back and forth between Gunny and Charlie as each speaks.)

GUNNY: I am not a slob. I just like peanuts!

CHARLIE: Oh, puh-lease! I've seen your room. You think mildew is a flavor!

GUNNY: And the other day you were sweeping the ceiling!

CHARLIE: It needed it!

NAT: *(To Ward and Callie.)* Did you ever feel like the referee in a [Mike Tyson] fight? *[Or insert the name of another boxer.]*

WARD: Aaaaaall right, already! I don't want to hear any more about it. There will be no fighting for the next 3,000 miles. Am I clear?!

TRIO: Yes, sir.

WARD: Better. *(To Callie.)* I can see this is gonna be a fun trip.

CALLIE: Now, Ward...

WARD: Don't even start with me. You and your scenic route.

GUNNY: *(Sheepishly.)* Dad...?

WARD: What?!

GUNNY: I gotta whiz.

WARD: No you don't!

GUNNY: It's my bladder!

WARD: How could you need to go? Jeez, we just left the turnpike. Can't you hold it?

GUNNY: You wouldn't ask Mom to hold it.

WARD: Your mother wouldn't want to stop an hour out of Trenton. Look, nobody else needs to go, so suck it up, Gunny.

(A few seconds of silence pass.)

CHARLIE: Dad...I gotta go, too.

WARD: *(To Gunny.)* What are you, contagious? No, Charlotte Anne, we are not stopping till we at least get into West Virginia.

(A few seconds of silence pass.)

NAT: Dad...?

WARD: Don't you dare!

NAT: Well, it was taking so long to get the car loaded, and you know how much I love A&W...?

GUNNY: She drank that whole 2-liter of root beer.

NAT: Shut up, Gunther!

WARD: Don't yell at your brother!!

CALLIE: And don't call him by his real name—you know he hates it.

NAT: *(Singing "nyah-nyah" style to Gunny.)* Gunther, Gunther, Gunther...

GUNNY: Keep it up, and I'll use your makeup bag as a urinal... *(To Ward.)* ...'cuz I still gotta go.

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CHARLIE: Me, too.

NAT: Me, three.

WARD: No! We are not stopping. If you three can't hold it,
then sit there and float!

(A few seconds of silence pass.)

CALLIE: Uh...Ward...honey...I...well...

WARD: Oh, crap!

CALLIE: Ward, not in front of the children.

(Lights down. Spot up on the side of the stage. Charlie and Gunny walk into the spot.)

CHARLIE: Despite the occasional pit stops...

GUNNY: We still managed to make it through Virginia.

CHARLIE: Through Tennessee.

GUNNY: And into Alabama on the first day.

CHARLIE: Where our slow-with-a-buck father got us a single
at the [Red Roof Inn] in Tuscaloosa. *[Or insert the name of
another motel.]*

GUNNY: Where kids stay free.

CHARLIE: And Nat had to say she was 12.

GUNNY: Charlie's now 11, and I'm eight, according to the
desk clerk.

*(Lights up. Four chairs are now set facing each other to give the
appearance of a bed. Callie sits on the "bed" looking at a map, as
Ward stands holding the urn as though it was a bomb.)*

CALLIE: So, if we get an early start tomorrow maybe we
could stop for a little while and see the Creole Museum in
New Orleans.

WARD: *(Indicating urn.)* Where am I supposed to put this?

CALLIE: Well, you could've left her in the car.

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WARD: Are you kidding? This is the only reason we're schlepping cross-country. I'm not letting it stay in a car that might get stolen out there.

CALLIE: Oh, please, Ward. Like anybody's going to try to steal that car. What's its book value? \$900?

WARD: It's \$1,200, thank you. That car's a classic.

(Nat enters, wearing greasy coveralls, with a turned around baseball cap, and holding a dipstick.)

NAT: She's throwing oil again, Dad. We're down a quart since this morning when I checked it. It's probably just the plug again.

WARD: How's she holding water?

NAT: I don't know. I have to wait for it to stop steaming so I can check it.

(Charlie enters carrying a roasted hot dog on a stick.)

WARD: *(To Charlie.)* Hey, where'd you get that?

CHARLIE: Well, we had those cold frankfurters in the ice chest...

WARD: Yeah...

CHARLIE: I just held this one over the engine block. *(She takes a bite.)* It's not bad. Once you get used to that slight taste of Pennzoil.

WARD: Aren't you afraid of germs?

CHARLIE: Heat kills germs. That's why I brought along the steamer.

WARD: The steamer?! What? You can't live one week without de-wrinkling?

(Gunny enters with three toasted marshmallows on a stick, and a Hershey bar in his other hand.)

GUNNY: Hey, we got any graham crackers? With this Hershey bar and these marshmallows, I think I can make s'mores.

WARD: Hey, will the Buick Buffet please stop.

CALLIE: Now, Ward, I think it's nice that they found a way to use the car's overheating problem.

WARD: Well, I don't! *(To Nat.)* So, what do you say, grease monkey, can we make it across the desert?

NAT: Yeah, it's just the thermostat. You can get me one of those in the next town when we stop for the U-joints.

WARD: U-joints! Since when does the Skylark need U-joints?

NAT: Since forever, but now that we're on this, this –

CHARLIE: Quest?

WARD: Look, Nat, those U-joints will last another 10,000 miles. Trust me.

NAT: Dad, if you don't let me replace the U-joints, by the time we hit Louisiana, the wheels are going to fall off.

CHARLIE: You mean like the muffler?

WARD: *(To Nat.)* The muffler fell off?

NAT: Not really.

GUNNY: But it is dragging on the ground. Makes sparks whenever we hit a chug hole.

WARD: *(To Nat.)* Can you fix it?

NAT: Yeah, but as long as I'm messing with it, I might as well get it a new gasket.

WARD: A new gasket? Just how much is your little shopping spree at [PEP Boys] going to cost me? *[Or another automotive company.]*

NAT: I could show you a picture of an arm and a leg.

CHARLIE: Why didn't we just fly?

WARD: All of us? Without three weeks advance reservations? Just who do you think is financing this trip? *[Microsoft]? [Or another company.]*

GUNNY: So far it feels more like [Enron]. *[Or another company.]*

CHARLIE: Well, just you and Mom could've gone, and we could be at home enjoying our summer vacation.

WARD: Right. Like I was going to leave you two home in the care of Penelope Pit-Stop here. I wanted to come back to the house I left, not Attica!

CALLIE: Now, Ward, don't start snapping at the children. They're tired.

WARD: They're tired!? Neither one of you ever took a turn at the wheel today. *(Holds up urn.)* I was about to ask Aunt Gertie if she was up for it!

CALLIE: I'll take the first few hours tomorrow so you can rest.

NAT: Yeah, Dad, give it a rest.

WARD: Fine. Fine. You think I'm being a noodge? Okay, if anyone needs me, I'll be in my office. *(He begins to cross to the offstage bathroom.)*

NAT: For pity's sake, turn the vent on.

CHARLIE: And don't be in there forever.

WARD: Hey, I poop, therefore I am. *(Noticing something in paper.)* Aw, fudge! The G-darn Mets lost again!

(Gunny cuts him off from the bathroom, as he holds out his hand.)

GUNNY: That'll be two dollars, please.

WARD: What?

GUNNY: Mom said that from now on every time you cuss on this trip, you have to give me or Charlie a dollar, and Charlie told me to do all the collecting.

WARD: But I wasn't cussing.

CHARLIE: Dad, c'mon, you think we haven't figured out after all these years that you made up your own swear words so Mom won't get on your case?

NAT: Yeah, you started way back with me, Daddy. Only now all of us know what "dastard," "blitz," "G-darn," "sun of the beach," and "fudge" really mean.

GUNNY: So for the rest of this trip, every time you cut loose, whether real or in code, it's gonna cost you.

(Gunny holds out his hand to Ward.)

WARD: *(To Callie.)* You have got to be kidding!

CALLIE: Well, Ward, the children have developed an occasional potty mouth, and I do believe it has a lot to do with you.

WARD: The hell it does!

(Gunny sticks out his hand again.)

CALLIE: But, Ward...

WARD: Forget about it. They get it from TV. To say it's me is a load of Frances Ford crappola.

CHARLIE: *(To Nat.)* Hey, you forgot about that one.

(Gunny holds out his hand.)

GUNNY: You're up to four dollars now, Dad.

WARD: Really? Well, hold your breath while you're waiting to collect it, will ya?

CALLIE: *(Threatening.)* Ward...

(Ward reaches into his pocket and peels off three bills from a wad of cash.)

WARD: This is a bunch of bull— *(Gunny puts out his hand again.)* —loney. Bologna. *(To Callie.)* Is that gonna cost me anything, dear?

CALLIE: Just be careful, Ward. You know how impressionable they are.

WARD: Yeah, impressionable. And by the end of this trip, rich!

(Ward exits. Gunny, Charlie, and Nat gather round Callie like a bunch of cavemen warming themselves around the fire.)

NAT: Mom, can we go home?

CHARLIE: Please, Mom.

GUNNY: This is crazy.

CHARLIE: Even for Dad.

NAT: Lookit, Mom, nobody's better at holding that old bucket of bolts together with duct tape and axle grease than I am. But I'm a mechanic, not a magician. It's not gonna make it cross-country.

GUNNY: I heard that!

CHARLIE: And, thanks to Dad, we have one bed for five people. What are we, the Waltons?

GUNNY: Word up!

NAT: And I am not saying I'm 12 again just so Dad can save ten bucks.

GUNNY: I'm sayin'!

NAT: Will you shut up, you little spaz?

GUNNY: I'm agreeing with you.

NAT: Well, do it in English, not hip-hop!

GUNNY: I'm just trying to be supportive.

CALLIE: Funny you should say that, Gunny. Supportive is just what I'm trying to be of your father. I know he can get—

(Without missing a beat they chime in.)

CHARLIE: Crazy?

GUNNY: Nuts?

NAT: Maniacal?

CALLIE: Overzealous. But we have to give him our support. He's only doing what he thinks is right.

CHARLIE: But he's never right.

CALLIE: Charlie!

GUNNY: He's not one of life's heavy winners.

CALLIE: Gunny!

NAT: You might even say—

CALLIE: Don't say it, Nat! Look, kids, your father would never admit it, but he needs us. He always acts like we're in his way...that he'd get along better without us. But deep down inside...he couldn't get along without us to complain about. Think of all the times he's done something stupid...
(The kids think, grimace, and groan.) ...it's always with the best intentions.

GUNNY: The road to ruin is paved with good intentions.

(Callie, Charlie, and Nat all react to Gunny.)

CALLIE/CHARLIE/NAT: Huh?!

GUNNY: History Channel.

CALLIE: Now come on, kids. Rally round the flag. I mean just think of your dad without us around...you think he has his problems now...

(The sound of a toilet flushing is heard. Lights down. Spot up. Gunny and Charlie walk into it.)

CHARLIE: My mom worked in guilt like other people worked in marble.

GUNNY: She could sculpt your shame.

CHARLIE: And before it was over, she had me and Gunny in tears.

GUNNY: After she reminded us who it was who rushed us to the hospital when I was one and Charlie was three...

CHARLIE: When we decided that Windex was grape juice.

GUNNY: She got Nat out to work on the Buick again...

CHARLIE: When she reminisced about how Dad worked two weekends of overtime at the plant...

GUNNY: So that he could afford to buy her a formal she wanted to wear at her 8th-grade dance.

CHARLIE: One of the few times in her life Nat actually wanted to wear a dress.

GUNNY: Yeah, frilly she ain't.

CHARLIE: So after we had been properly tamed...

GUNNY: Mom did everything but remind us she breast fed.

CHARLIE: We guiltily let the two of them take the bed for the night.

GUNNY: Nat used the foldable army cot we had brought along, which was only slightly more comfortable than the floor.

CHARLIE: We used two lumpy sleeping bags, which were only slightly less comfortable than the floor.

(Lights up on main stage. Chairs are set for the car again. Everyone is seated in the same seats as before.)

GUNNY: Day two.

CHARLIE: On the road again.

GUNNY: The three of us were catching up on the sleep we didn't get the night before.

CHARLIE: I figured out that two folded-up towels "borrowed" from the [Red Roof Inn], make a pretty good pillow. *(Charlie sleeps.)*

GUNNY: And, I discovered that Nat is good for something after all... *(He leans up against Nat's shoulder and falls asleep.)*

CALLIE: *(To Ward.)* Are you sure you don't want me to drive, honey?

WARD: Not until the sun comes up, babe. *(Checks backseat.)*
At least Gunny stopped snoring. What a buzz saw.

CALLIE: That was Nat, dear.

WARD: Good grief, can't she even sleep like a girl?

CALLIE: Just be glad she managed to change the radiator hose last night.

WARD: Changed?

CALLIE: Well, actually she cut it where the crack was and still managed to stretch it over and clamp it into place.

WARD: That's my girl, always thinking and saving me a buck or two.

CALLIE: Ward...I was talking to the kids last night, and —

WARD: I know they'd rather be home, Callie, but this trip, the will, the inheritance...it's all going to change our lives. How long have I been working at that nowhere job at the plant?

CALLIE: A long time?

WARD: I hate my job, Callie.

CALLIE: Well, I always have my job at the library.

WARD: I hate your job, Callie. Jeez, if only I could pass the G-dam civil service exam.

CALLIE: Well, you've tried 26 times, Ward. Maybe you're not cut out for civil service. I'm not sure why you'd want to work for the government.

WARD: Because the pay's good, and the only way to get fired is if you come to work with a machine gun. But I could never catch a break in Jersey.

CALLIE: Maybe Jersey isn't the problem.

WARD: Oh, don't tell me...

CALLIE: Oh, Ward, the kids aren't the only ones who'd rather be back in Trenton. I'm missing the summer brunch for the PTA.

WARD: The PTA? Honey, wasn't it your PTA committee that voted to approve an after-school exercise program called, "Do you want my body?"

CALLIE: Well, we never even thought they'd take it *that* way. The fitness lady in the video just meant that if you wanted to look like her, you'd have to follow certain guidelines.

WARD: Yeah, there was a lot of talk about guidelines after you guys did that.

CALLIE: Ward, don't rub it in.

WARD: Callie, I know they think I'm a doink...a jerk...

CALLIE: A buffoon.

WARD: Don't help me, Callie. Look, I know this may be a wild goose chase, but...I'm 44 years old, and what have I done with my life? Where have I been? This little road trip is the first time I've been out of the tri-state area...

CALLIE: That's not true. We've been on vacations. We've been to Orlando, Myrtle Beach, that nice ski lodge up in Vermont.

WARD: And how many of those vacations have I been with you?

CALLIE: Oh, that's right. That was just me and the kids...but you were with us when we went to New York City and Hartford.

WARD: Just what part of tri-state area didn't you understand?

CALLIE: Oh, yeah, right...

WARD: Look, baby, all I know is that this trip, and the money, and all...it's gonna change everything for us. It's got to.

CALLIE: Oh, Ward, don't start that again...

WARD: I mean it, Callie. I'm sick of being stuck in neutral. I'm tired of waiting for my life to change. I never had a plan. Never had a mission. Never had a calling. I just...bounced from one event in my life to another, not knowing where the next bump in the road was gonna take me. Jeez, I'm not a man. I'm a pinball. It's like being stuck on a merry-go-round. Going 'round and 'round, and never once reaching out for the brass ring. I want better for us...

(Nat begins moaning, and throws Gunny off of her shoulder.)

NAT: *(Talking in her sleep.)* No, I can't rebuild it! We have to buy a new one.

WARD: I even want better for them. Perhaps a nice boarding school in upstate New Hampshire... *(A loud farting sound is heard.)* Did Gunny have pork rinds for breakfast again?

CALLIE: *(Sheepishly.)* Sorry. He just wouldn't take no for an answer.

(A louder, longer farting sound is heard.)

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WARD: Next time, let me tell him. And for pity's sake, roll down your window...I'll be glad when we get this G-darn urn to San Diego...

CALLIE: Santa Monica.

WARD: Wherever. By the way, where is the urn?

(Callie looks through the tote bag at her feet.)

CALLIE: It's right...uh-oh...Ward? I thought I had it in my tote bag, but...

WARD: But, what?

CALLIE: I think I left it in the bathroom back at the [Red Roof Inn].

WARD: Aw, fudge! Now we're gonna get charged for the towels.

(Lights down. Spot up. Charlie walks into the light.)

CHARLIE: We lost half a day. And had to pay \$37.50 for all the towels Dad "borrowed."

(Gunny walks into the light.)

GUNNY: But on the positive side, we did get Aunt Gertie back.

CHARLIE: There she was...sitting on the toilet waiting for us.

GUNNY: Just like when she was alive, and we'd come to pick her up for Sunday dinner.

CHARLIE: That night, as we made it across Louisiana, Mom made Dad stop in Lake Charles so they could go to [Harrah's]. *[Or insert the name of another casino.]*

GUNNY: Mom likes to play baccarat.

CHARLIE: Dad plays the slots.

GUNNY: So while Mom and Dad were at the casino...

CHARLIE: And, Nat was outside burping the Buick...

GUNNY: Charlie, me, and Aunt Gertie sat in the room.

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CHARLIE: No, not at [Harrah's], but at the [Motel 6] two exits down.

GUNNY: We were playing the travel version of Kismet.

CHARLIE: And I was eating Gummi Bears.

GUNNY: I had dumped all the powder out of a bunch of grape Pixie Stixs onto the game board, and was licking my finger and sticking it into the mound.

CHARLIE: Eeuuww, disgusting. Gunny was losing and stalling.

(They sit on the floor. Spot down. Lights come up on the main stage where the game, the Gummi Bears, the blue powder, and the urn are all on the floor. Gunny vigorously shakes the dice holder.)

GUNNY: Okay, so you're ahead on points. I can still catch up.

CHARLIE: If we play till you graduate maybe?

GUNNY: *(Still shaking dice holder.)* Just watch this come back, Charlie. How many points is it again? *(She shows him a score pad.)* Oh, sun of the beach!

CHARLIE: Will you roll already! You've been shaking that thing for three minutes.

GUNNY: I just want a good roll.

CHARLIE: You haven't had a good roll all night. That's why you're down by 200 points.

GUNNY: *(Still shaking holder.)* Shut up! I'm concentrating.

CHARLIE: You're rolling five dice. How much concentration can it take?!

(As Gunny finally rears back to roll, he knocks over the urn, spilling its contents all over the board. The ashes are now mixed with the grape powder and Gummi Bears. They freeze for a second as they look at the sight.)

GUNNY: *(Noticing the dice.)* Hey, five of a kind! I finally got a good roll!

CHARLIE: Gunny! You idiot! You just knocked Aunt Gertie all over the carpet!

GUNNY: I know, I know! It was an accident. I didn't mean — I'm going to hell, aren't I?

CHARLIE: Oh, get a hold of yourself. You are not going to hell.

(Nat stands on the side of the stage and mimes turning a door handle then knocking.)

NAT: Guys! Let me in. The door's locked.

CHARLIE: Then again...

(They both begin frantically scooping the ashes back into the urn. Grape powder, Gummi Bears, and dice also get scooped up. Nat knocks again.)

GUNNY/CHARLIE: *(Nonchalantly.)* Who is it?

NAT: What do you mean, who is it? How many people do you know in Lake Charles, Louisiana? Now open up!

CHARLIE: *(Still scooping.)* Nat? Is that you?

NAT: Yes. And you'd better decide which me you want to open the door for...the slightly ticked off me I am right now...or the homicidal me you'll see if you wait much longer!

(Gunny grabs the small hand vacuum.)

GUNNY: Just a second, Nat...

(Gunny turns on the vacuum to clean up the last of the mess. With hands shaking, Charlie tries to replace the lid on the urn. Nat begins digging through her pockets.)

NAT: What the heck are you two doing in there?!

(Gunny is still vacuuming and Charlie is still trying to attach the urn lid.)

GUNNY/CHARLIE: Nothing...

(Nat pulls out her key.)

NAT: Never mind. I found my key.

(Gunny and Charlie whimper in unison. Charlie gets the lid back on and Gunny hides the hand vacuum. They both sit down and act nonchalant on the "bed" as Nat mimes unlocking the door and bursting in.)

GUNNY: *(Matter-of-factly.)* Hi, Nat. How's the Buick?

(Lights down. Spot up. Charlie walks into the spot.)

CHARLIE: I don't know why I helped him with the biggest cover-up since Watergate...

(Gunny walks into the spot.)

GUNNY: Watergate? Impressive.

CHARLIE: Hey, you're not the only one who can watch the History Channel, ya know? Anyway, I still don't know why I saved his bacon back in Lake Charles.

GUNNY: *(Rests his head on her shoulder, cloyingly.)* Because I'm your little brother and you love me.

CHARLIE: *(Glares at his head on her shoulder.)* No, that's not it.

GUNNY: *(Lifts his head off her shoulder.)* Okay, how about guilt by association?

CHARLIE: Yeah, that's it.

GUNNY: Day three...which begins a two-part mini-tragedy entitled: "Our Trek Across Texas"!

CHARLIE: Chapter One: "Dad gets lippy with an East Texas Cop."

(Lights up on main stage. Chairs are in the car configuration again, and everyone is sitting in their usual positions. From behind the car, an East Texas Cop enters, wearing a uniform and a helmet with a flashing red light on it.)

CALLIE: Now, Ward, be nice...

WARD: Nice? We were going 53 miles an hour!

COP: Mornin', folks. New Jersey plates. The Garden State, eh? Ya'll come all the way from New Jersey just to speed through Beaumont, did you?

WARD: No, officer.

COP: Are you sayin', ya'll not from New Jersey?

WARD: No. I mean, yes, we're from Jersey. I just didn't think I was speeding.

COP: Well, ya wuz. And from the sound that front end of yourn was a-makin', I'd say you need yerself some new U-joints.

WARD: *(To Nat.)* Say it, and die! *(To Cop.)* Look, officer, I couldn't have been going that—

COP: I clocked you goin' 54 in a 40. I'd say that's speedin'.

WARD: A 40?! But this is part of the interstate.

COP: Business District.

WARD: Business must be slow.

(Callie and the kids groan.)

COP: They think yer funny up thare in New Jersey, do they?

GUNNY: No, they don't.

WARD: Shut up, Gunny. *(To Cop.)* So, how much is this gonna cost me?

COP: Fine's usually ten dollars per mile you were over the speed limit—

WARD: But that's 140 dollars!

COP: Yup. Plus citation charges, and processin' fees, but yer prob'ly lookin' at not much more'n three hun'red.

WARD: What!?! Look, Bubba, are you out of your redneck gourd?! I'm not shelling out 300 bucks for you and your buddies to buy deer antlers and beer with— *(To Callie.)* I didn't just say that, did I?

CALLIE: Yes, dear...

WARD: Aw, fudge! *(Gunny holds out his hand. Ward whips out his wad of bills and absently sticks a dollar in Gunny's hand, before turning back to the Cop.)* I-I-I didn't exactly mean...like it sounded.

COP: You want to step out of the vehicle, sir?

(Still holding a wad of bills, Ward unconsciously gestures with that hand.)

WARD: Look, officer, couldn't we just—?

COP: *(Sees the bills.)* Are you tryin' to bribe an officer of the law?

WARD: *(Suddenly notices bills.)* Huh? Oh, no, this is for him...for the fudge...

COP: You pay him to make you fudge? Brownies probably. With all that illegal stuff baked right inside, uh-huh?

WARD: No! No, it's not like that...

COP: *(Referring to urn.)* What's in that thare thaing?

CHARLIE: Aunt Gertie.

COP: Is that what ya'll call it up in New Jersey?

WARD: Look, officer, you got it all wrong...

COP: Step out of the car, please, sir. I'm gonna have to administer a field sobriety test.

WARD: I'm not drunk. It's nine in the morning!

COP: You usually do yer drinkin' later, do ya?

WARD: Yes...I mean, no! I mean, will you listen to me, you stupid hillbilly hick! *(To Callie.)* I didn't just say that, did I?

CALLIE/NAT/CHARLIE/GUNNY: Yes!

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COP: *(Into walkie-talkie.)* This is Grainger, I'm gonna need backup on this speedin' stop. I have reason to suspect drugs.

(Lights down. Spot up. Dejected, Gunny appears.)

GUNNY: Day four...still in Texas.

(Charlie appears.)

CHARLIE: After the arraignment, Dad paid 300 dollars for the ticket.

GUNNY: Another 500 dollars for disorderly conduct.

CHARLIE: And the judge made him sing "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You" in front of the entire court.

GUNNY: That was kinda the best part. But we lost another half day.

CHARLIE: By that night, we'd barely made it through San Antonio, and Dad stopped for the night at a [Super 8 Motel] in Kerrville, where we had dinner.

GUNNY: Chapter two: "Dad Discovers Southern Hospitality."

(Lights up on main stage. Chairs are configured as though they are sitting around a table. Gunny and Charlie join the others.)

COOK: *(Offstage.)* Order up!

(A bell is heard, and Gunny and Charlie instantly fall asleep. Charlie falls face first into her plate of food and Gunny falls across Ward, who struggles to push him off as he speaks.)

WARD: Oh, man, is this post-hypnotic whatzit *ever* going to wear off?

CALLIE: Now, Ward, Mesmero did say that because of their susceptibility quotient, the effects of the session could linger for several days.

WARD: It's been several days! And still every time a bell goes off these two drop off like they just took a bite out of Snow White's apple.

CALLIE: Oh, Ward...

WARD: It's like going state to state with twin narcoleptics.

NAT: Hey, Dad, don't knock it. It comes in handy.

CALLIE: What do you mean?

NAT: Well, remember that first night in Tuscaloosa? When you and Dad went to the movies? Well, these two were hogging the cable TV, so I went to the lobby and used the courtesy phone to ring the room...

CALLIE: Nat, you didn't?!

NAT: By the time I strolled back to the room, Frick and Frack were dead to the world, and I got to see the movie I wanted.

CALLIE: Natalie, I can't believe you would do such a thing!

WARD: Yeah, Nat, that was a rotten thing to do. *(Under his breath.)* And why didn't I think of it?

(Callie claps her hands, and Gunny and Charlie wake up as though they had never been asleep.)

CHARLIE: Eeuuuww, how did my face get covered with barbecue sauce? *(Wipes her face vigorously with a napkin.)* Eeuuuww, disgusting.

CALLIE: *(To Nat.)* We'll discuss this later, young lady.

WARD: Yeah, and for pity's sake go get yourself some more food.

NAT: Dad, they looked at me funny when I went up there the second time. I'm not going up there again.

WARD: Nat, please. This is an all-you-can-eat buffet. *(Ward notices that Charlie, having finished wiping her face, is now vigorously rubbing the tablecloth. To Charlie.)* What are you doing?

CHARLIE: This catsup stain doesn't want to come out. Mom, can I order a club soda?

WARD: No. Leave the catsup where it is. We're not taking the tablecloth with us when we leave. *(To Nat.)* And you. Go get some more food.

NAT: No chance. I'm telling you, Dad—

WARD: And, I'm telling you, don't be ridiculous. I had two huge plates, and I'm going up for more.

GUNNY: Dad...she's right. I don't think they want you to.

WARD: Gunny? You're not even going back? But, you're always hungry. Jeez, I've raised a coward.

CALLIE: Ward, please.

WARD: If he's not even brave enough to go up for seconds... Tell me, Son, are you a free-range chicken? *(Ward begins to laugh, until he sees Callie glaring at him, then the laughter dies in his throat.)* Look, come on with me. I'll show you how it's done.

GUNNY: Sure you're not worried I might molt on the way?

(Ward motions for Gunny to get up and they cross to the other side of the stage where they are met by a Cook, who is wearing a chef's hat and a greasy apron.)

WARD: *(To Cook.)* 'Scuse me...can I get a clean plate?

COOK: No.

WARD: But, I wanted to get—

COOK: No!

WARD: But your sign says, "All You Can Eat."

COOK: Ya know those two plates of ribs and fixin's you scarffed down like a TY-rannosaurus Rex?

WARD: Yeah...?

COOK: Well, that's all ya can eat!

WARD: But...

(Cook grabs Ward by the shirt, pulling him into a face-to-face position.)

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COOK: Are you unhappy with our buffet policy, sir? (*Holds up a butcher knife.*) Or do I need to explain it some more?

WARD: No...no...that's quite all right. I'm not hungry anymore anyway.

COOK: Good. The kid can have some dessert if he wants, but you...go sit down and drink your tea!

(Cook exits. Gunny looks at Ward a moment.)

GUNNY: Sorry, Dad, I just can't help it.

(Gunny begins doing his best imitation of a chicken as he struts around Ward.)

COOK: *(Offstage.)* Order up!

(The sound of a bell is heard. Gunny drops like a dead chicken into Ward's arms. Charlie falls back into her plate of food at the table. Lights down. Spot up. Charlie walks into the light.)

CHARLIE: Day five...we finally got out of Texas.

(Gunny enters.)

GUNNY: But not before Dad got lost twice and Mom made us stop to eat at the only barbeque-slash-antique car museum in West Texas.

CHARLIE: The little town was called Van Horn.

GUNNY: The memories of eating a Poor Boy while looking at a Model-T Ford will last a lifetime.

CHARLIE: We had finally made it to the tip of Texas...El Paso...

GUNNY: Where Dad insisted that he knew a shortcut, and somehow managed to get us lost across the border in Juárez, Mexico.

CHARLIE: We never even noticed we had crossed over.

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GUNNY: And the government claims our borders are safe.

CHARLIE: Huh?

GUNNY: CNN.

CHARLIE: You watch too much cable. Anyway, while we were cruising Ciudad Juárez, Dad clipped a flower cart and knocked out our right front blinker.

GUNNY: So as we headed back for our own country...

CHARLIE: And we were passing the sleepy little village of Olla Llena...

GUNNY: We were stopped by a deputy sheriff...

CHARLIE: One, because Dad was speeding...again!

GUNNY: Two, because we had no right front blinker.

CHARLIE: The deputy also found Aunt Gertie...

GUNNY: Rolled up in a [Red Roof Inn] towel, laying in the trunk.

CHARLIE: He opened her up...

GUNNY: Smelled her...

CHARLIE: Stuck his finger in her...

GUNNY: Tasted her...

CHARLIE: Then took us all to jail.

(Lights up main stage. Ward, Callie, and Nat stand, holding up a cut-out section of jail bars to represent the jail.)

GUNNY: Actually, Mom, Dad, and Nat went to the jail.

CHARLIE: Gunny and I were taken by the sheriff to his mother's cantina.

(An Old Mexican Lady, dressed as a cook, comes out and puts a huge black griddle, known as a comal, and two large round mounds of tortilla masa in front of the kids and then silently exits. The kids kneel next to the masa and comal, and begin making tortillas as they speak.)

GUNNY: The cantina...

CHARLIE: Known as El Mosca Negro...

GUNNY: Was the only 4-star...

CHARLIE: And 400-fly...

GUNNY: Restaurant in town.

CHARLIE: Where Gunny and I were put to work in the kitchen.

GUNNY: Making these flat round things that tasted like a roof shingle.

CHARLIE: You tasted one?

GUNNY: Well...a guy gets hungry patting out this tor-TILL-a stuff.

CHARLIE: Tortilla.

GUNNY: Whatever.

OLD MEXICAN LADY: *(Yells from offstage.)* Apurense con essos tortillas!

CHARLIE: What did she say?

GUNNY: How should I know?

CHARLIE: You're the one who watches Univision.

GUNNY: Only "Lucha Libre" on the weekends.

OLD MEXICAN LADY: *(Yells louder from offstage.)* Apurense con essos tortillas!

CHARLIE: She's saying it louder. What does it mean?

OLD MEXICAN LADY: *(Yells even louder from offstage.)* Apurense con essos penche tortillas!

GUNNY: She's either saying, "Hurry up with the tor-TILL-as," or that her aunt's really cheap.

OLD MEXICAN LADY: *(Yells from offstage.)* Apurense! Apurense! Cabron, gringos!

(Charlie and Gunny look at each other.)

CHARLIE: I don't want to know.

(They begin to pat out the masa faster. On the other side of the stage, Nat begins to sing, as she runs a tin cup across the bars of the jail.)

NAT: *(Sings.)* "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow..."

(On the other side of the stage, Gunny holds up an odd-shaped tortilla and shows Charlie.)

GUNNY: Hey, look, Wisconsin.

NAT: *(Sings.)* "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen."

CALLIE: Ward...?

NAT: *(Sings.)* "Nobody knows my sorrow."

WARD: Yes, dear...

CALLIE: Tell me again...why didn't we fly?

(Callie and Ward look at each other as Nat continues singing. On the other side of the stage, Gunny and Charlie continue making tortillas. Blackout. Intermission.)

[End of Freeview]