

PICKLE JUICE
A screwball comedy in two acts

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Pickle Juice
Cast of Characters

DOTTIE MAE MACKNOTS

Aged 50+, an expert in groundwater contamination

ROSCOE MACKNOTS

Aged 50+, her husband

MILLIE MACKNOTS

Aged 25, their daughter

JANE

Aged 50+, a friend of the family, now homeless

CARL

Aged 25-30, an unexpected guest

GRANDPA

Aged 90+, Dottie Mae's grandfather

HERMAN

Aged 50+, Dottie Mae's employer

PRISCILLA

Aged 50+, Herman's wife

Set Requirements: one interior set.

Time: The present
Place: A home in San Luis Obispo County, California

ACT I
Scene One

The lights rise on the interior of the MacKnots home. The inhabitants clearly don't have much money, but the items they do own are neat and clean and perfectly placed. The front door is on the angled wall stage left, the door to the kitchen is stage right. Upstage is the hallway to the bathroom and a staircase that leads to the unseen second floor. Also upstage is a window that looks out onto the narrow side yard. Stage left is the living room area, which contains seating. There is a mantel down stage left. Sitting on the mantel is a one-liter water sample in a sterile polypropylene container. The water is brownish grey and looks disgusting, with unidentifiable bits floating in it. Stage right is the dining room area. Along the wall is a sideboard with a cabinet underneath. On top of it sits a bowl of plastic apples.

DOTTIE MAE enters through the front door, carrying a bag of groceries. Her husband ROSCOE is vacuuming the carpet. The vacuum cleaner is not turned on. ROSCOE wears a bowling shirt.

DOTTIE MAE

Roscoe, are you aware that the vacuum cleaner is not turned on?

ROSCOE

Of course I'm aware. It's not even plugged in.

ROSCOE continues to vacuum the carpet with studied concentration.

DOTTIE MAE

Oh. Well, as long as you're aware.

She sets her purse on the sideboard, then exits into the kitchen. Though she seems ditsy, DOTTIE MAE is actually

intelligent. It just doesn't always show.
MILLIE enters from the stairs, carrying
a portable CD player.

MILLIE

Dad, it'll work better if you plug it in.

ROSCOE

No it won't. It's broken. It's been broken for weeks.

He continues to vacuum.

ROSCOE (CONT'D)

I've been meaning to fix it, but I haven't had time.

MILLIE calls out to DOTTIE MAE.

MILLIE

Mama, Daddy's scaring me.

DOTTIE MAE

(From inside the kitchen.)

Tell him to put his shirt back on.

ROSCOE stops vacuuming.

ROSCOE

I resent that.

MILLIE sets down the CD player in the
living room area. DOTTIE MAE enters,
putting an apron on over her dress.

DOTTIE MAE

I'm joking. You know you're my love-bucket.

MILLIE

Ewww.

ROSCOE

Not in front of the child.

MILLIE

The child hasn't been a child for many years.

DOTTIE MAE

(Lovingly.)

You'll always be our child, even when you're a withered old prune of ninety. So tell us, Roscoe, why are you vacuuming when the vacuum cleaner is broken?

ROSCOE

See for yourself.

He gestures to the carpet. DOTTIE MAE and MILLIE look at it, and then look at each other.

ROSCOE (CONT'D)

The pattern! Look at the pattern!

MILLIE

You mean the stripes?

ROSCOE

Yes I mean the stripes! Even though the vacuum cleaner is broken, it's still capable of creating a pattern of horizontal stripes on the carpet. A pattern which I have meticulously crafted.

DOTTIE MAE

And what is the benefit of pushing a pattern of stripes into the carpet?

ROSCOE

Am I the only one around here who's a visionary?

DOTTIE MAE

I'm afraid so, darling.

ROSCOE

When our guests arrive, they will see the horizontal stripes on the floor. Even if it only registers subliminally. And they will assume that the carpet has been vacuumed. They'll think it's clean.

MILLIE

But it's not clean.

ROSCOE

So what? Who cares whether it's clean or not? The point is they will think that we cleaned. For them.

Pause.

DOTTIE MAE

Are you going to run the vacuum cleaner over the front lawn to make it look like you mowed?

ROSCOE

I may be a visionary, but you are a genius.

Perhaps ROSCOE kisses DOTTIE MAE. ROSCOE picks up the vacuum cleaner and exits out the front door. DOTTIE MAE is appalled that he's actually going to do it.

DOTTIE MAE

Oh no, I didn't mean for him to . . .ohhhh.

MILLIE

How does it feel to be a genius?

DOTTIE MAE

It's scary; I never know when my genius is going to strike.

MILLIE crosses to the stairs.

MILLIE

I put the CD player over there.

DOTTIE MAE

Thank you; which CD do you put in?

MILLIE

The Vivaldi.

DOTTIE MAE

Perfect. Wait a minute—don't go to your room. Aren't you going to give me a hand in the kitchen?

MILLIE

I have to take a shower.

DOTTIE MAE

You should have done that earlier. Okay, but don't take too long.

MILLIE exits up the stairs. ROSCOE enters. He closes the front door behind him.

DOTTIE MAE (CONT'D)

That was quick.

ROSCOE

I haven't even started. I came in to get my hat.

DOTTIE MAE

If you're not finished before they get here, I will die of embarrassment.

ROSCOE

I'll be finished.

ROSCOE goes to the coat closet and gets a hat.

DOTTIE MAE

How's the roast doing?

ROSCOE

It looked good last time I checked.

DOTTIE MAE

And the rice?

ROSCOE

Keeping warm in the cooker.

DOTTIE MAE

And the dog?

ROSCOE

Locked up in the garage until the guests are gone.

DOTTIE MAE

Good. Tonight, everything must be perfect.

ROSCOE

Everything's fine.

DOTTIE MAE

Not fine, perfect.

ROSCOE

Dottie Mae, you will convince him to cancel the project. I know you will.

DOTTIE MAE

How can you say that with such confidence?

ROSCOE

Because I have a feeling in my neck. And my neck is never wrong.

DOTTIE MAE

Never?

ROSCOE

My neck told me to marry you, and that turned out well. Relax.

DOTTIE MAE

How can I relax? The health of hundreds of people, maybe millions, depends on me.

ROSCOE

So if you don't convince him tonight, we'll have him over again.

DOTTIE MAE

I don't want him in my home. It's bad enough I have to see him at work.

ROSCOE

Then why keep working for him? The stress is ruining your health.

DOTTIE MAE

I can't quit and you know it.

ROSCOE

Line up a better job first and *then* quit.

DOTTIE MAE

If it's that easy, how come you don't have a job?

ROSCOE

I don't have your mad skills with bad water.

DOTTIE MAE

Have you even been looking?

ROSCOE

I've put in applications all over town.

DOTTIE MAE

Recently? I appreciate all you do around here, but you've got to start bringing in some money.

ROSCOE

You think I like being out of work?

DOTTIE MAE

No . . .

ROSCOE

You think I like having to ask you for money every time I have to run to the corner store?

DOTTIE MAE

No . . .

There is a knock at the front door.
ROSCOE crosses and opens it. CARL
enters with a full enema bag hanging
from an I.V. pole.

CARL

Enema Man.

ROSCOE

I didn't order an enema. (To Dottie Mae.) Did you call for The Enema Man?

DOTTIE MAE

No, I didn't. (Gets an idea.) Grandpa. (Yells to offstage right.) HEY GRANDPA!
(Brief pause.) DID YOU CALL AND ORDER AN ENEMA?

All three look off stage right and listen.

GRANDPA

(Emitting a groan that sounds constipated.)

Uhhhh!

ROSCOE

Right through there.

CARL crosses stage right and exits,
taking the I.V. pole with him. As he
exits, he reveals that "The Enema Man"
is printed on the back of his shirt.
ROSCOE closes the front door. He and
DOTTIE MAE continue arguing as
though nothing has happened.

ROSCOE (CONT'D)

Do you think it's fun for me being stuck here at home with everything falling apart and no money to fix anything properly?

DOTTIE MAE

No, but you still have it easier than I do. You don't have to put up with what I have to put up with.

ROSCOE

I wouldn't put up with it. I'd tell him right to his face what I thought of him.

DOTTIE MAE

And he would fire you so fast you'd be out on your butt before you even had time to blink.

ROSCOE

Dottie Mae, don't you think it's time you stood up to Herman?

DOTTIE MAE

I can make this job work.

ROSCOE

No. You can't. You'll never make it work because he's never going to change!

ROSCOE exits out the front door.
DOTTIE MAE crosses to the kitchen door. Seeing the bowl of apples, she takes one from the bowl and smells it. Not a short sniff, but a long, lingering intake of air.

DOTTIE MAE

I love the smell of plastic.

There is a knock at the front door. She returns the apple to the bowl, crosses to the door and opens it, revealing JANE, a homeless woman.

DOTTIE MAE (CONT'D)

Hi Jane.

JANE

Do you know that Roscoe is vacuuming your front lawn?

DOTTIE MAE
(Embarrassed.)

I know. And the funny part is, that vacuum cleaner doesn't even work.

JANE

Dottie Mae . . .it would be funny even if the vacuum cleaner *did* work.

DOTTIE MAE
(Thinks about it.)

I suppose it would. (She laughs.) Come in.

JANE enters.

JANE

Your family reminds me of that family on TV. What was their name?

DOTTIE MAE

The Cunninghams?

JANE

No.

DOTTIE MAE

The Cleavers?

JANE

No. Oh I remember; The Munsters.

DOTTIE MAE

You think we're a bunch of freaks?

JANE

No! I don't think you're freaks, I love this family. You're all so . . .unique.

DOTTIE MAE

Jane, you just implied I'm a vampire and my husband is a Frankenstein creature.

JANE

I did no such thing. And if I did, ya know I didn't mean it. I would never insult this family, not after all you've done to help me out. (Slight pause.) May I use your bathroom?

DOTTIE MAE

I'm afraid they're both in use. Millie's taking a shower upstairs, and Grandpa's getting an enema as we speak.

JANE

Say no more. I'll use the one at the gas station on the corner.

DOTTIE MAE

Any luck finding work?

JANE

No. I keep hoping I'll dig up an exclusive story, an exposé. Then maybe I could get my old job back.

DOTTIE MAE

I stopped reading the Tribune when they let you go.

JANE

Aw, how sweet.

DOTTIE MAE

What's that growth on your arm?

JANE

Mmm? Oh that. That's my lucky tumor. (Brief pause.) Ya wanna rub it?

DOTTIE MAE

Uhh, no thanks; I'm good.

JANE

What smells so yummy?

DOTTIE MAE

Roast beef. I would offer you some but my boss and his wife are coming over for dinner.

JANE

I've never heard you talk about your boss. Ya get along with him?

DOTTIE MAE

Does Tokyo get along with Godzilla?

JANE

So why have him over for dinner?

DOTTIE MAE

To stage an environmental intervention.

DOTTIE MAE's cell phone vibrates and she takes it out of her pocket and looks at it.

DOTTIE MAE (CONT'D)

Uh oh; excuse me a moment, Jane. (To the phone:) Hello? . . .yes . . .What? . . .Oh no! . . .Yes of course . . .I would do the same thing if your shoes were on my feet. . . You'll be greatly missed. Bye bye. (She ends the call, tilts her head back, and wails.)
Aaaahhrrgh! (To Jane.) That was the man from the Environmental Protection Agency.

JANE

More food for everyone else.

DOTTIE MAE

Jane, I was counting on him to convince my boss not to build on the old Hovstad Ranch.

JANE

He bought that place?

DOTTIE MAE

Yes, and contaminant concentrations in the groundwater are not declining.

JANE

Is that bad?

DOTTIE MAE

Bad? The pollutant plume has expanded downgradient *and* laterally, and the natural attenuation processes are not occurring.

JANE

Can you put that in layman's terms?

DOTTIE MAE

If Herman goes through with his development project, a lot of innocent people will get sick.

JANE

Is he going to build a Jack in the Box?

DOTTIE MAE

No, something even worse. And it will ruin his business. Maybe even bankrupt him.

JANE

If the man won't listen, it's his own fault.

DOTTIE MAE

But then I'll be out of work. We'll lose the house, the car, everything. Without my paycheck, we'd be in your situation.

JANE

How can you be only one paycheck away from livin' in your car?

DOTTIE MAE

We're middle class.

JANE

Oh dear.

DOTTIE MAE

You remember what it's like.

JANE

Vaguely; it seems like forever ago.

DOTTIE MAE

You've only been out of work a few months.

JANE

Time crawls when you're livin' in a Camry.

DOTTIE MAE

I'm sure it does. I wish Roscoe could find a job.

JANE

What about Millie? She's working; ask her to help out.

DOTTIE MAE

Jane, Millie hands over her entire paycheck to help run this house.

JANE

And you still don't have enough money?

DOTTIE MAE

Millie teaches public school.

JANE

Ohhh.

DOTTIE MAE

If I lose my job, the whole family is going to have to move back to Windmill Valley.

JANE

What's wrong with Windmill Valley?

DOTTIE MAE

Roscoe used to say Windmill Valley was like youth: it was something to get through on your way to somewhere else.

JANE

I've lived in places like that. I've lived in marriages like that.

DOTTIE MAE

How can I convince Herman? He's not going to take my word for it, my word isn't enough. Testimony from the EPA was a crucial part of my plan. (DOTTIE MAE gets an idea. She is thrilled.) That's it! I knew my mind would come up with something! (She mulls it over.) Oh but I couldn't do that. Not me. I'll have to cancel the dinner. (She makes a call on her cell phone.) Hi, may I please speak to Herman . . .What? Who is this? . . .Oh . . .I see. No, no message. Thank you. (She ends the call.) That was the sitter. They already left. They're on their way. They're gonna be here, what am I going to do?

JANE

Calm down.

DOTTIE MAE

I have to stop him from building on that land.

JANE

What about that idea you just had?

DOTTIE MAE

Oh I couldn't do that. (Slight pause.) Could I? No. I'd be too scared. Besides, too many things could go wrong.

JANE

Ya do whatcha gotta do. When I was a teenager I wanted to go see Jimi Hendrix but I didn't have any money. Flat broke. Not a cent. So I went down to the Red Cross and gave blood. I was too young to give blood, but I did it anyway. And I got my five bucks and went and bought my ticket.

DOTTIE MAE

Five dollars?

JANE

That's what they paid back then.

DOTTIE MAE

How much was the concert?

JANE

I don't remember, this was ages ago. But when I went to see Jefferson Airplane at Fillmore East it cost me four bucks. I know cause I saved the ticket stub. So the Hendrix concert must have cost three bucks, cause I remember that after I bought my ticket I still had enough money left over to get something to eat *and* put a little gas in my car.

DOTTIE MAE

Times have changed.

JANE

You're tellin' *me*. Nowadays there ain't *nobody* I want to see enough to give blood for.

DOTTIE MAE

There was only one Hendrix.

ROSCOE enters with the vacuum cleaner.

ROSCOE

Hi Jane.

JANE

Hi there. You always vacuum your front lawn?

ROSCOE

No, this was the first time. But it turned out pretty good. Take a look on your way out. The stripes are nice and even.

ROSCOE puts the vacuum cleaner and his hat in the closet.

JANE

I'd better go, you have things to do to get ready for your guests. I'll see you on laundry day. (She starts to exit.) Remember, ya do whatcha gotta do. You hear me Dottie Mae?

DOTTIE MAE

I hear you.

JANE exits.

DOTTIE MAE (CONT'D)

(Calling after her, sweetly.)

Bye-bye! (She closes the door and turns to ROSCOE.) If this dinner doesn't go well our life is headed straight down the toilet.

ROSCOE

Why wouldn't it go well?

DOTTIE MAE

The man from the EPA isn't coming.

ROSCOE

What are you going to do?

DOTTIE MAE

I'm going to ask someone to impersonate the man from the EPA

ROSCOE

Who?

CARL enters. DOTTIE MAE sizes him up.

DOTTIE MAE

Finished already? That was quick.

CARL

They don't call me "The Enemizer" for nothing.

DOTTIE MAE

I was wond--excuse me, what is your name?

CARL

Carl. Carl Hubbell.

DOTTIE MAE

Carl, I was wondering if you could help us out.

CARL

I'll certainly try.

DOTTIE MAE

First, I'd like you to try on this old jacket of Roscoe's. We need to cover up that shirt.

She crosses to the coat closet and takes out a blazer or a sports jacket. She holds it up as CARL slips his arms into it.

ROSCOE

Look at that. It fits.

DOTTIE MAE

Looks good on him too. Roscoe, do you think this might actually work?

ROSCOE

You're going to pull this off without a hitch.

CARL

Pull what off?

DOTTIE MAE

Hello there. I'm Dottie Mae MacKnots, and this is my husband Roscoe. Grandpa Kyle you already know.

CARL

It's nice to meet you. Kyle speaks highly of you both.

DOTTIE MAE

He better, if he knows what's good for him. Anyway, I'm throwing a dinner party tonight, and wouldn't you know it, one of my guests has cancelled on me.

ROSCOE

We know it's late notice, but if you could stay for dinner . . .

DOTTIE MAE

You would be doing me a big, big favor.

MILLIE enters. CARL takes a long look at her.

CARL

When do we eat?

DOTTIE MAE

Thank you!

ROSCOE

You're sure this won't get you into trouble?

CARL

(Still looking at MILLIE.)

I'm hoping it does.

ROSCOE

I mean with your boss.

CARL

I set my own hours. And Kyle was my last enema of the day. You must be Millie.

MILLIE

How do you know my name?

CARL

Kyle told me about you.

MILLIE

Oh. Well. Any friend of Grandpa Kyle's is . . . unusual.

DOTTIE MAE

Millie, this is Carl. He's agreed to stay for dinner.

MILLIE

Hello there Carl.

CARL

Hello.

DOTTIE MAE

Now Carl, here's the hard part. We need you to pretend to be from—

MILLIE

I smell smoke.

DOTTIE MAE

Oh no! The roast beef!

DOTTIE MAE and ROSCOE run offstage. Perhaps a few wisps of smoke emanate through the kitchen door as they exit.

DOTTIE MAE (CONT'D)
(wailing from offstage)

Aaaahhrrgh!

MILLIE

I hope you didn't have your heart set on roast beef.

CARL

I try not to eat red meat. I've seen what it does to people. And I've got my heart set on something else.

MILLIE

What did Grandpa tell you about me?

CARL

Enough to make me want to stay for dinner.

MILLIE

I hope I can live up to your expectations.

CARL

I try not to have expectations. I've seen what it does to people.

MILLIE

Sounds like you've been around.

CARL

My occupation affords me a unique perspective on the world.

MILLIE

I'll bet it does. What led you to choose . . .colonic irrigation, as a profession?

CARL

When I was a kid I had to help my great-grandfather whenever he needed an enema. When it came time to get a job, enemas seemed a natural way to . . .enter the workforce.

MILLIE

And it doesn't bother you?

CARL

I've never been grossed out by them, so that helped a lot when making it my profession. What about you? What led you to choose teaching children?

MILLIE

I've never been grossed out by them, so that helped a lot when making it my profession.

CARL

I don't think I have the patience to do what you do for a living.

MILLIE

Funny, I was just thinking the same thing.

CARL

Thanks, by the way, for calling it colonic irrigation.

MILLIE

Isn't that the proper term?

CARL

Oh yeah. But when people refer to what I do, they're usually much cruder.

MILLIE

Colon-meister?

CARL

Bowel Blaster.

MILLIE

You must get teased a lot about your job.

CARL

Yeah, I've heard 'em all.

MILLIE

Sewage Spewage?

CARL

Innards Wizard.

It becomes a game.

MILLIE

Popping and Mopping.

CARL

Hosing and Closing.

MILLIE

Pumping and Dumping.

CARL

Plunging for Grunge.

MILLIE

Unspooling the Stool.

CARL

Spelunking in the Trunk.

MILLIE

Unclogging the Logging.

Slight pause.

CARL

I've never heard that one before. (He is impressed.) Will you go out with me?

MILLIE

That depends. Are you a liar?

CARL

No, --

MILLIE

I don't go out with men who lie.

CARL

What if I need to spare someone's feelings?

MILLIE

Trust me, being insulted isn't nearly as bad as being lied to.

CARL

I may have other bad habits, but lying isn't one of them. So how about it?

MILLIE

Let's see how this dinner tonight goes.