



Ed Vela

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**BIG DOG PUBLISHING**  
P.O. Box 1400  
TALLEHAST, FL 34270

A Step Away  
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"We might just end up  
a real family."

—Art

## A Step Away

**CHRISTMAS COMEDY.** Art, a divorced father of three, and Rhonda, a widow with two sons, have eloped, purchased a new house, and are looking forward to moving in together and living like one big happy family. The only problem is that Art's kids don't know about Rhonda's kids, and Rhonda's kids don't know about Art's kids. Rhonda and Art manage to keep the secret until moving day when their kids finally meet each other and find out—to their horror—that they'll be living together in a cramped 3-bedroom, 1.5 bath home. Things go downhill quickly as family members are forced to cope with endless annoyances including putrid foot odor, excessive back slapping, belching on command, and using the living room as a closet. And amongst all these heartwarming family moments there remains important family decisions to be made like whether or not to buy whole milk or 2-percent milk or to have a real or artificial Christmas tree. But in the end, though the Christmas tree may be artificial, there's a chance that this family may become a real family after all!

**Performance Time:** Approximately 90 minutes.

## Characters

(7 M, 4 F, 5 flexible)

(With doubling: 5 M, 4 F)

**ART DAVILA:** Divorced father; newly married to Ronda; Latino.

**RONDA PETTIGREW-DAVILA:** Widowed mother newly married to Art; commercial airline pilot.

**IAN DAVILA:** Art's son from his first marriage; college student.

**SUZY DAVILA:** 16, Art's daughter from his first marriage; responsible.

**BEE DAVILA:** 8, Art's daughter from his first marriage; delivers her lines rapidly in a chatty, quick style.

**MERRIN (MARE-in) PETTIGREW:** 13, Ronda's son from her first marriage; doesn't like having a stepfather.

**HAWTHORNE PETTIGREW:** 9, Ronda's son from her first marriage.

**REF:** Wears a referee's uniform (white hat and striped shirt); flexible.

**UMP:** Wears an umpire's facemask and chest protector; flexible.

**MR. BREGANCE:** Assistant principal.

**MR. TOWNSEND:** Parent.

**GRANDMA:** Wears a pillbox hat and frumpy coat.

**USHER:** Flexible.

**DOCTOR:** Wears a lab coat and has a stethoscope; flexible.

**SANTA:** Wears a traditional Santa suit; non-speaking.

**ELF:** Wears an elf costume; non-speaking; flexible.

### Options for doubling:

REF/GRANDMA/USHER/DOCTOR/ELF (female)

UMP/MR. TOWNSEND/MR. BREGANCE/SANTA (male)

## Setting

Living room, dining room, and bedroom of the Davila/Pettigrew house. There is a sofa, coffee table, end table with phone, and an armchair CS. There is a front door (frame or solid) USC, and a small dinette table and chairs are set DSL. A bed and nightstand are DSR. For the hospital chapel in Act II, there is a stand with a cross, a stand with a large candle set closest to the wings left, and a rail sits in front of a pew. The hospital room has a bed and a chair.

## Synopsis of Scenes

**ACT I:** Living room, dining room and bedroom of the Davila/Pettigrew family home.

**ACT II:** Living room; hospital chapel; hospital room.

## Props

Whistle	2 Phones
White sheets	Keys
Magazine	Coat, for Art
Large flashlight	Catalogue
Roses	Water glass
Prescription bottle	Hairbrush
Pills	Banana
Pajamas, for Hawthorne	Official-looking paperwork
2 Cereal bowls	Artificial flocked Christmas tree with lights
2 Boxes of cereal	Twister game
Coffee cup	Pajamas, for Bee
Glass of juice	Large orange kiddie baseball bat
Comic book	Baseball cap and shirt, for Ian
Newspaper	Baseball attire for family members
2 Chairs	Home plate
Sport coat, for Merrin	Sofa
Horn-rimmed glasses	Watch
Telescoping pointer	2 Feather boas
File folder	2 Straw gardening hats
Propeller beanie cap	Medical chart
Sweatshirt with "Authority Sucks" on it, for Art	Stethoscope
Pointed Kaiser Wilhelm helmet	Rosary beads
Black trench coat, for Art	Bed
Monocle	Bandages
Riding crop	2 Leg casts or large bandages
Camouflage jumpsuit, for Merrin	IV bottle
Large pocket watch with chain	Chair
Frying pan	Tinsel
2 Torn backpack straps	Fake snow
Crutches	Community college catalogue

## Sound EFFECTS

"Shave and a haircut" honk

Cell phone

Music

Phone ringing

Click

Dial tone

Sound of bat hitting ball

Farting sound

Longer farting sound

Christmas song

## ACT I

*(AT RISE: Living room, dining room, and bedroom of a house. Art, Ronda, Suzy, and Merrin are positioned around the living room set, frozen under a blue wash. Ump and Ref enter from opposite sides of the stage and cross to DSC. Ref makes a windmill motion with her arm to "wind the clock" as Ump raises both his arms.)*

UMP: *(Yells.)* Play ball!

*(Lights come up full. Actors unfreeze.)*

MERRIN: Whaddya mean, "We can't"?!

RONDA: Merrin Angus Pettigrew, we have talked about this before. Art is allergic. We can't have a tree this year.

SUZY: Yeah, you want my dad to be draining into his socks this December just so you can feel more Christmassy?

MERRIN: I don't care what your dad is draining into, it's not Christmas without a *real* tree!

SUZY: Look, ferret face, my dad's not gonna have to take a steroid shot this winter just because you're an arbor-phile! Don't you *ever* think of anybody but yourself?

MERRIN: Oh, you should talk, Miss hour-and-a-half-in-the-bathroom-using-up-all-the-hot-water!

SUZY: You have a half-bath down here!

MERRIN: Yeah, and have you tried to take a shower in that basin?

ART: You two need to learn to com-mun-ni-cate. Can I say something here?

MERRIN/SUZY: NO!

ART: It's nice to know where I stand in this family.

MERRIN: This isn't a family. It's the roommate situation from Planet Torture!

RONDA: Merrin, don't talk to your stepfather like that.

MERRIN: Oh, I am ever so sorry, Art. Please forgive me for being so *honest!*

RONDA: All right, that's enough, young man. If you can't be civil you can go to your room.

MERRIN: It's not my room! I used to have a room. Now I'm stuck with –

*(Hawthorne enters.)*

HAWTHORNE: Merrin, come quick, the hamsters are doing it in their cage.

MERRIN: That!

RONDA: Hawthorne, go on back to your room. Merrin will be there in a minute.

HAWTHORNE: 'Kay, but he's missing the best part.  
*(Hawthorne exits.)*

MERRIN: Oh, fine! There's nothing quite like experiencing a live hamster love fest.

SUZY: Don't knock it, you pencil-necked geek, it's the only action you'll see till you get out of college.

MERRIN: Oh, suck my –

*(Ref blows her whistle, all freeze. Ump steps up.)*

UMP: Low and outside. Ball one!

*(Ref blows her whistle, action resumes. Merrin backs up to the beginning of his line.)*

MERRIN: Lick my –

*(Ref blows her whistle again. All freeze. Ump steps up.)*

UMP: Ball two!

*(Ref blows her whistle. Action resumes. Merrin re-starts line again.)*

MERRIN: Kiss my—

*(Ref blows her whistle again. All freeze. Ump steps up.)*

UMP: Ball three!

*(Ref blows her whistle. Action resumes. Merrin re-starts his line again.)*

MERRIN: Bite me!

UMP: *(Yells.)* Steeeee-rike!

RONDA: Merrin!?

SUZY: I wouldn't get my mouth near you, but—

*(Suzy hauls off and swats Merrin on the shoulder with an open hand.)*

MERRIN: Ow! It's bad enough I risk my life every time she drives me someplace. Now she's gonna batter me to death?!

*(Suzy whacks him again on the same spot. Ref blows her whistle. All freeze. This time Ref throws her flag too.)*

REF: *(Doing appropriate hand signal.)* Illegal use of hands...Suzy...penalty, Dad gets to yell.

*(Ref blows her whistle again. Action resumes.)*

ART: Susan! What have I told you about hitting him?!

SUZY: You told me you wished you could do it.

RONDA: *(To Art.)* Oh, really?

ART: *(To Ronda.)* Kidding. But remember I'm Latino and the kids are half—we're a lot freer with our hands.

MERRIN: Freer with your hands?! What is that? Your code phrase for “physically abusive”?!

SUZY: Oh, puh-lease, the only thing truly abused around here are our ears, having to listen to you prattle on with your complaints, complaints, complaints!

MERRIN: *(Balls his hand into a fist.)* Suzy, if you weren't a girl... *(Looks her up and down.)* ...sort of...

ART: Okay, separate! Suzy, I'm sure there're some dishes in the kitchen that need to be washed, or put away, or something.

SUZY: It's Bee's turn.

ART: Suzz! Kitchen! Now!

SUZY: I hate that dishwasher. It vibrates like a bed in a sleazy motel.

ART: And just how would you know about that, young lady?!

SUZY: Would you believe...late night cable?

MERRIN: Would you believe, her last date?

RONDA: Merrin!

*(Suzy moves to go after Merrin again, Ronda intercepts her and points her back to the kitchen. Suzy exits SL.)*

BEE: *(Calls from offstage.)* Daaaaaad!

ART: In here, Bee!

*(Bee enters SR and delivers her lines rapidly, without hardly taking a breath, in a chatty-quick style. Note: Bee delivers all her lines this way unless otherwise indicated.)*

BEE: Dad, Hawthorne says the hamsters are doing it, but he won't tell me what “doing it” means. Does it mean the same thing as what the doggies do in the park sometimes whenever they're stuck together? Because last time I was in the park, I remember these two dogs, and when one moved the other one went right with him. Come to think of it, I guess one was a her. But when I asked Suzy about it all she

did was roll her eyes and pull me away from there. Suzy can pull pretty hard, and she's always yanking at me. Could you talk to her about pulling me, Dad? Because sometimes it hurts, and my friend Millie says that you can relocate your shoulder if someone tugs you real hard, and she's always tugging too hard, so could you talk to her?

*(Pause. Art looks at her in amazement.)*

ART: Sure.

BEE: *(Regular speed.)* Okay. I'll be in Hawthorne and Merrin's room watching the hamsters do—whatever it is they're doing. What are they doing again, Daddy?

ART: Uh...well...uh...Ronda you want to take this one?

RONDA: Thanks loads, honey. *(To Bee.)* Well, Bee, when you go back in to look at the hamsters...uh...you'll see one in the front, and one in the back...and...uh...see...the one in the back is sick, and the one in the front is pulling him to the hospital.

MERRIN: Ya know, Mom, even when I was eight, I wouldn't have bought that pathetic hamster paramedic explanation. It's a good thing Art's kids are stupid.

*(Ref blows her whistle. All freeze.)*

REF: *(Doing hand signals.)* Illegal procedure...Merrin...penalty...five minutes of exposition.

*(Ref whistles, lights go down to the blue wash again. All unfreeze and begin throwing white sheets over furniture in all areas of the stage. Then they all exit except for the Ump and Ref, who stand in upstage corners at the ready. Art and Ronda enter through the door UC.)*

RONDA: Well, it looks good to me so far.

ART: Hold on, Ronda, the light switch is over here, I think.

*(Art mimes flipping a light switch. The lights come up full. Ronda looks around.)*

RONDA: It's furnished?

ART: Yeah, I thought it would be easier that way. Instead of deciding which couch, or whose dresser, everything here is new...relatively speaking. And it's all...ours.

RONDA: Decide that all by yourself, did you?

ART: Well, I would've checked with you, but you were on a 3-day layover in London, if you recall.

RONDA: Oh, yeah, fog-bound at Heathrow. How could I forget?

ART: Look, I'm sorry if I overstepped my bounds, I just thought—

RONDA: Art...it'll be okay.

*(They kiss.)*

ART: You sure?

RONDA: I'm more concerned about the kids.

ART: I still say it was a mistake keeping their existence a secret from each other all this time.

RONDA: Art, remember six months ago? It was hard enough for my boys to accept you, and your girls to accept me, without them knowing about each other.

*(Note: If the Ref plays Grandma, the Ref takes off her white hat and zebra shirt and puts on a pillbox hat and frumpy coat. Ref exits through the door, taking the hat and shirt with her.)*

ART: Yeah, but hitting them with it now, when we've already eloped, when we're officially married, moving into a new place together? This has backlash written all over it. We lied to them, honey.

RONDA: I don't call it a "lie." I call it a "mental reservation."

ART: Two kids on your side, three on mine? That's not a mental reservation, that's a mental self-storage unit. I'm just glad one of mine is already away at college because even he would have a problem with this, and he's more mature than I am.

RONDA: Look, my mother will be here with Merrin and Hawthorne any minute. When is Suzy bringing Bee?

SUZY: *(From offstage.)* Oh my gosh, is this the right house? What a dinky little dump!

ART: Right about now. I wonder if I should check the car for new dings now or wait till later.

*(Suzy enters with Bee in tow.)*

SUZY: Dad, Ronda, please tell me this isn't the right house.

ART: This is it. Home, sweet, home.

SUZY: It's teeny-weeny.

ART: Well, whaddya expect this close to town?

SUZY: Four bedrooms and two full baths?

ART: Well, we got three and one-and-a-half. Cope.

SUZY: Well, I'm just glad there's only four of us. Unless the Red Raider makes it home for the holidays. *(A "shave and a haircut" honk is heard from off.)* What the heck was that?

RONDA: My mother's honk...code...to let us know she's here.

SUZY: Why is your mother coming? *(To Art.)* She's not living with us, is she?!

ART: No, Suzz, but there's something you ought to know –

*(Merrin and Hawthorne come bursting into the room from the front door.)*

MERRIN: Hi, Mom. Hi, Art. Sorry we're late, but traffic on the loop was an absolute bi –

*(Ump steps up.)*

UMP: Foul ball!

MERRIN: Was an absolute bear. *(Referring to the girls.)* Who is this? The welcome wagon? Like they couldn't have brought brownies?

HAWTHORNE: Yeah, brownies are good.

SUZY: *(Realizing.)* Oh, my God. Oh, my God! Oh, my God!!

MERRIN: Oh, I get it. They're Jehovah Witnesses.

RONDA: Merrin, where's your grandmother?

*(Grandma enters through the front door wearing a frumpy coat and pillbox hat. She walks slowly and gingerly.)*

GRANDMA: Right here, and my feet are killing me. For having such a small house, you certainly have a big yard. It's like walking across a football field from the street to your front door. And my bunions are on fire! *(Looking at the sheet covering the sofa.)* Somebody get this white thing off the couch. I've got to sit down. *(The boys hurriedly strip the white sheet off the sofa. Art does the same with the dining room table and chairs.)* So, has everybody gotten acquainted? Do they at least know about each other yet? I told you *not* to handle it this way, Ronda, but you never listen to Mama.

MERRIN: Wait a minute! *(To Art.)* These two are yours?

*(Art nods.)*

SUZY: And there's one at Texas Tech, too. *(To Ronda.)* And these two are yours?

*(Ronda nods.)*

MERRIN: *(To Ronda in Ricky Ricardo voice.)* Ooooooh, jyew got some 'splainin' to do, Lucy!

SUZY: Yes, Daddy Dearest, how is it we didn't know Ronda had kids up until now?

ART: Jeez, I have got to go to the bathroom. We got a half-bath down here, don't we? So I'm just gonna go there...and...uh...be there. *Exits SR, stopping briefly to grab a magazine for effect.*

MERRIN: *(Threatening.)* Mom...

RONDA: *(Seized by the inspiration.)* Mom! Have I shown you the kitchen?

GRANDMA: What show? I've been here 30 seconds!

*(Ronda pulls Grandma up from the sofa.)*

RONDA: Let me show it to you. It's fabulous!

GRANDMA: But my feet—

RONDA: *(Whacko.)* We'll soak your feet in the kitchen! Come on!

*(Ronda drags Grandma off SL, as the kids all look at each other with that rare blend of discomfort and contempt, especially from Merrin and Suzy. Finally, Bee steps over and offers her hand to Hawthorne, who shakes it.)*

BEE: *(Rapidly.)* Hi, I'm Bee. That's short for Beatrice, but my dad says that Beatrice will be my old lady name, but for now Bee suits me best. He calls me his busy bee, 'cuz I talk fast. Some of the teachers think I'm hyper, but I don't think so, 'cuz I can concentrate when I want to, and I don't move around a lot. It's just when I got a lot to say, I don't want to take a long time to say it. If I do, Suzy or Ian will cut me off, and I don't get to finish. People shouldn't take a long time to say things anyway, 'cuz then they can get boring, and I don't like it when people talk and get boring. Then some people say I talk fast 'cuz I got too much sugar in my diet, but I don't think it's the sugar. 'Cuz I don't even like sugar.

MERRIN: *(To Hawthorne.)* Good!

SUZY: Hey! Don't make fun of my little sister, you...you...you!

MERRIN: Who are you callin' a "you-you"...you!

SUZY: Suzy.

MERRIN: Merrin.

HAWTHORNE: Hawthorne.

SUZY: How the heck did you two get weirdo names like that?

MERRIN: Mother's obstetrician's maiden name.

HAWTHORNE: Mom's favorite author's last name.

SUZY: *(To Bee.)* Somehow Susan and Beatrice aren't looking so bad now.

*(Awkward silence. Each pair of siblings looks off in the direction that their respective parent exited.)*

MERRIN: They're not coming back, are they?

HAWTHORNE: Ever?!

*(Merrin elbows Hawthorne in the ribs.)*

MERRIN: Shut up, barnacle brat! *(To Suzy.)* Nickname.

SUZY: What's yours? Whale poop?

*(Pause. Silence.)*

MERRIN: So, is the one at Texas Tech a boy?

SUZY: No, he's a man. You're a boy.

MERRIN: With a chest like yours, you can join the club. *(Suzy whacks Merrin across the shoulder.)* Ow! You hit me!

SUZY: You're being a creep.

MERRIN: But we don't hit.

SUZY: Maybe your family doesn't hit, but mine is...different.

MERRIN: Yeah, I noticed that when I first met Art. I said to myself, either he just got back from the beach, or he's not exactly Irish!

SUZY: Hey! My mother was Irish!

*(Pause. Silence.)*

MERRIN: Is your mom dead?

SUZY: Practically. She's living in Australia. Your dad?

MERRIN: Dead.

SUZY: Sorry.

MERRIN: Wasn't your fault.

*(Pause. Silence.)*

SUZY: How the heck are all six of us going to live in three bedrooms?

MERRIN: Who says you'll be living *in* the house?

*(Suzy grabs Merrin by the front of the shirt.)*

SUZY: Keep it up, and you'll be living *under* it.

*(Ref enters and blows her whistle.)*

REF: Time out! End of flashback.

*(Blue wash comes up. Ump steps up moving down right to be joined by Ref. Ref and Ump take the chairs from the dining room table and move them in a line to the center of the apron.)*

UMP: Due to contractual obligations, we now move forward in our game...

REF: To a time in mid-December when Ian, the Red Raider, is visiting from college...

UMP: And all are enjoying an evening out...

REF: Taking in a program at Hawthorne's private school.

*(Lights up full. Actors are sitting on chairs set up along the apron and looking out at the audience like they are watching a play. From left to right: Bee, Suzy, Art, Ronda, Merrin, and Ian. Ump and Ref exit.)*

MERRIN: This has sucked the big —!

RONDA: Merrin, shhhh.

SUZY: Much as I hate to agree with Captain Crap-Head about anything, he's right. This play is putrid.

ART: Suzy, shut up. It's an elementary school play. Whaddya expect?

MERRIN: Well, I expected to be mildly entertained, and that went by the wayside.

*(Art stops and looks at Ian.)*

ART: What? Don't you have an opinion, Ian?

IAN: I'm in college now, Dad. I've learned to reserve my opinion...at least till the end of the grading period.

SUZY: Who—in even the weird-eyed, whacko world of theatre—came up with the idea of putting on “Annie” at an all-boys school anyway?

IAN: I think my drama professor would call it “innovative.”

MERRIN: Yeah, well I call it sadistic.

BEE: *(Slowly.)* What's saddest-stick?

SUZY: Selling tickets to this play.

ART: Suzy, cut it out. Ya gotta admit, Hawthorne's been doing pretty good as Miss Hannigan.

RONDA: *(Pensively.)* Yes, he has...it's frightening.

MERRIN: No, frightening would be sending him to public school, like I'm stuck in.

ART: Can you go an hour without making it about you? Your little brother's down there killing himself singing.

SUZY: And in those heels.

RONDA: I do have to concede, in the first act when he sang “Little Girls—”

BEE: *(Regular Speed.)* Showstopper.

SUZY: Yeah, but we're still stuck looking at Cleavon Townsend, who's built like a linebacker, do the lead.

MERRIN: Yeah, it's like watching [Ray Lewis] play Annie.  
*[Or insert the name of another football linebacker.]*

RONDA: Well, look, it's almost over, so will you two please hold on and try to be polite after the show is over?

MERRIN: Polite?! You made me buy barnacle brat a dozen long-stemmed roses for the curtain call.

RONDA: It's tradition.

MERRIN: Well, then, you give them to him.

MR. TOWNSEND: *(From offstage. Loudly.)* Hey! Will you all hold it down over there? My boy's about to sing the reprise of "Tomorrow"!

ART: *(Calls to offstage.)* Sorry, Mr. Townsend.

SUZY: *(Trying to whisper.)* What do you think, Bee? *(Bee thinks for a second, then takes a deep breath to respond, but Suzy cuts her off.)* Never mind. Forget I asked.

BEE: *(Soft voice, regular speed.)* Can I tell you later?

SUZY: No.

MERRIN: *(Softer voice to Ian.)* Daddy Warbucks sure is a stinkpot.

IAN: *(Lowering voice.)* But an interesting casting choice—going with the Samoan boy.

ART: Will you two shut up before Mr. Townsend comes over here and kicks my butt? Cleavon-slash-Annie down there isn't the only one built like a linebacker.

*(The Usher shines a powerful, blinding flashlight at the group from the wings.)*

USHER: *(From offstage.)* You all were asked to hold it down over there. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave!

MERRIN/SUZY: *(Look up.)* Thank you!

*(They all get up and begin to exit.)*

BEE: *(Regular speed.)* Darn! And just when they were going to re-praise "Easy Street."

IAN: What about the roses for Hawthorne?

ART: You want to give them to him?

**[END OF FREEVIEW]**