

Surprise

EXPLANATION PAGE

SET PIECES: misc. furniture for farm house living room, c. 1900-1930.

PROPS: Bible or other old-timey book or magazine; cake; cider; dining utensils.

CAST: Farmer Johnson; an adult male.
Billy Johnson; his son aged to match the farmer.
Parson Kern; an adult man....or woman.

BIO: see attached sheet.

PRODUCTION HISTORY: SURPRISE! was performed off-Broadway at the Theatre-Studio, Inc. in 2002.

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The reader will notice an almost total absence of stage direction. This is intentional. As an actor, playwright and director, I think it imperative to choose good actors and allow them to act.

"Good actors" being in short supply, I leave it to the director to determine who crosses where and when. Little or nothing in the play itself will depend upon blocking as such. Thus, the actions on stage can conform to the limitations of the set.

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SURPRISE!

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

FARMER JOHNSON: A man of any age suitable for having a child as old as Billy Johnson.

BILLY JOHNSON: This role can be played by a child of 10 or more. If over the age of 15+, the character should play the role in a mildly retarded fashion.

PARSON KERN: A man, 40+. Alternatively, this role could be played by a woman (as school-marm) with small adjustment to the dialogue.

(Discover the living room of a farmhouse, circa 1900. FARMER JOHNSON is sitting, reading a Sears-Roebuck catalog....or some more easily procured newspaper, book or magazine. We hear a noise off-stage.)

FARMER: Billy? Is that you, son?

BILLY: (from off-stage) Yes, Pa...I'm just puttin' some firewood in the kitchen.

FARMER: Well, when you finish that, come in here, boy.

(We hear the sound of firewood dropping and the boy enters.)

FARMER: There's somethin' I want you to do today, Billy. We've got a couple of cows that are ready to be bred. I want you to turn the bull loose with 'em. The parson's comin' right soon so I have to sit a spell with him 'cause your maw's feelin' poorly. I want you to stay down by the bull pen and then come tell me what happens.

BILLY: Yes, sir. I turn the bull loose with the two cows and then I'll come and tell you what happens.

FARMER: Good boy, good boy. It's the black cow and the white cow that need servicin'.

BILLY: Yes, sir. Black cow; white cow. (exit)

(Farmer resumes reading but there soon comes the sound of a flivver driving up to the house. That would be the ideal sound effect; if it isn't possible, then we settle for... a knock at the front door. Farmer opens door.)

FARMER: Well, howdy do, Parson. Mrs. Johnson's feelin' poorly but I do hope you can come in and have some of her angle food cake and a glass of cider.

PARSON: Glad to, Mr. Johnson, most happy to. Mrs. Johnson's not bad off, is she?

FARMER: No, no....just a little, ah, woman trouble...she'll be fine in a day or so. Now, you sit right there. Maw left the cake right here for us. (Cuts cake; pours cider.) I hope you didn't have any trouble finding our place.

PARSON: No, no trouble at all. Did have a blow-out and had to patch the tube.

FARMER: Sorry to hear that, pastor.

(Both characters freeze in place. Stage lights dim and then brighten, thus cleverly showing the passage of time.)

PASTOR:...so then I said, "Mrs. Kern; you simply must get the Women's Christian Temperance Union to do something about,...

(At this point, Billy bursts into the room.)

BILLY: Paw, Paw....the bull just fucked the white cow!

FARMER: (vastly embarrassed, takes Billy aside and stage whispers) Now, Billy, the parson is here today. You don't want to say that word in front of him!

BILLY: Gee, Paw, what should I say?

FARMER: You should just say, "The bull surprised the white cow."

BILLY: Yes, sir; I understand...."the bull surprised the white cow."

FARMER: That's right, son. Now, go on back and see what happens.

(Billy exits.)

FARMER: Sorry, Pastor. You know how boys are these days...

PASTOR: Think nothing of it, Mr. Johnson. Why, just the other day, I was telling Mrs. Kern.....

(Characters freeze; lights go down; lights come up.)

BILLY: (bursts into room and says) Paw, paw....

FARMER: (holds up his hand and interrupts him) I know, son...the bull surprised the black cow.

BILLY: That's right...he fucked the white cow again!

Blackout.