

Plans to Form a Human Chain Faltered

Characters

Bethany	female, early 20s
Meredith	female, late 20s
Jan	female, 55+
Davey	male, late teens
Brendan	male, mid-20s
Thomas	male, early to mid-20s

Synopsis

Bethany's volunteer efforts threaten to overwhelm her as she attempts to get a one-hundred yard section of an awareness-raising "human chain" organized. Her tyrannical supervisor terrifies, her brother is forced to cross dress, and her ex-fiancé arrives disguised as a clown. There's just not a lot of room for hand-holding. (Run time: 75 minutes)

Production notes:

It is imperative that Meredith be on usable wheels. Having her push a bicycle or a scooter defeats the purpose.

Jan's "episodes" are not to be accompanied by any sound or light cues suggestive of fantasy.

A cluttered backyard surrounded by acres of farm land. It is early morning. From offstage, BETHANY, early 20s, and her supervisor MEREDITH, 25-30, are heard before entering. When they do enter, BETHANY is walking and MEREDITH is on wheels. If budget allows, she will be on a Segway-type person mover. If not, she may be on a bicycle, roller blades, Heelies, or a razor scooter. She is aiming for maximum efficiency, for speed and the ability to cover a lot of ground. Her wheels bring her no joy.

BETHANY

I don't understand why it has to go this way, that's all. Can't we just sort of bend it so it stays on the side of the road?

MEREDITH

Bethany! The committee met about this 10 months ago and planned the route. Maybe you missed that meeting. You missed a lot of meetings. Maybe you never read the minutes. Were you conscientious about picking up the minutes of the meetings you missed?

BETHANY

I only missed—

MEREDITH

Don't make excuses. I didn't believe Thomas when he said you were capable of doing this. I didn't believe him, but he begged me. Quite frankly, I never thought you were up to this level of responsibility.

BETHANY

Then you should have fired me.

MEREDITH

You don't get off the hook that easy, Bethany. Thomas believed in you. Are you going to let him down? *(no response from a sad-looking BETHANY)* Look at me. Consider everything I've been through—the kind of household I was raised in?!? A lot of yelling, Bethany! A lot of criticizing! I should be holed up in a closet somewhere holding my knees to my chest and weeping. But I am not. I am out here, in the wilderness, on the side of the interstate, helping people! There's a lesson to be learned there. You yourself could be learning a lesson from me.

BETHANY

I get it.

MEREDITH

If you got it, then you would be radiating enthusiasm. You would be clinging to your captainship with everything you've got in you.

BETHANY

I am—

MEREDITH

Stop. You could've been a plain old participant. I think you might have been able to handle the drink station, even, but I really might need to consider possibly blaming myself for this. I saw it coming and I closed my eyes.

BETHANY

I can do it. Just please explain to me why it has to go here, exactly.

MEREDITH

It has to go this way because it has to turn. The human chain can't cross the interstate! You want your volunteers getting run down? I'm the Chain Supervisor, yes but this is on you now. I can't handle this for you. It's just too late. These, right here, are your hundred yards. This is why we delegate. So that when little problems like this come up, the Chain Supervisor doesn't get bogged down.

BETHANY

I don't want to go to these people's door and tell them that there's going to be a human chain running through their yard.

MEREDITH

Bethany, whatever goes on within these hundred yards is your responsibility. When I signed you up to be a captain, I had my doubts, but a team of superior leaders did the planning for this project. And you can rest assured that we planned the route so the chain would not intersect any homes or yards.

BETHANY

I know.

MEREDITH

This is not my mistake.

BETHANY

But there *has* been a mistake. You admit that.

MEREDITH

There has been no mistake on my part or the part of the planning committee. There are no houses or yards in the mapped path of the human chain. No parts of the chain intersect private homes or the land immediately surrounding them.

BETHANY

But my section does, Meredith.

MEREDITH

This house is not on our map.

BETHANY

But it's here in our reality.

MEREDITH

The map is my concern, the reality is yours. What time are your people getting here?

BETHANY

Within the next 15 minutes, probably.

MEREDITH

Please remember that the chain has to be complete at 9:30 and stay in tact long enough for the overhead news copter deal, and for the golf cart drive by.

BETHANY

The drive by?

MEREDITH

Channel 9 is going to start at one end of the chain and film a steady-cam shot of the entire thing, driving from one end to the other in a golf cart. Then they're going to interview me. It's going to be awesome.

BETHANY

It is? *(indicating the house)* Well, do you want to go talk to these people?

MEREDITH

God, Bethany, we've covered that! You're the captain of this section. I'm the supervisor of all the captains. I'm not going up to that door. I have to go make sure all the other captains are doing their jobs. I'm going to do that right now, but I'll be back in a bit to make sure you've got everything under control. Remember all the meetings we had about this, Bethany. Remember that I gave this spot to you as a favor, because Thomas asked me to. The next 60 minutes are it. We planned this thing to the inch—don't be the reason it falls apart.

BETHANY

Um, okay. So I'll see you at the drive by? *(She mimes some kind of shoot 'em up thing)*

MEREDITH

Bethany, drive by shootings aren't funny. They're alarming.

BETHANY

Oh.

MEREDITH

You often behave in ways that suggest you are socially inept.

BETHANY

I'm sorry.

MEREDITH

Work on that and maybe people will be more comfortable around you.

BETHANY

Okay.

MEREDITH

Thomas was always worried taking you out with his friends, you know, because of the way you—

BETHANY

You better go check the other groups.

MEREDITH

(startled at being interrupted) Oh right. I'll be back here way before it's time for the golf cart. We have to make sure everything is in total order before we let that camera roll down the line.

BETHANY

We will! We can do it!

MEREDITH

When I say "we" I mean "I." You have my number, right?

BETHANY

Yes.

MEREDITH

Well, try not to use it. Don't call me for anything stupid. My job is to make sure you're here and capable. I've done the best that I can with that. This leg is in your hands.

BETHANY

Your leg?

MEREDITH

No! God, Bethany! This leg, of the human chain, is now entirely on your shoulders.

BETHANY

You're using too many body parts.

MEREDITH

Goodbye. You should only call me if you drop dead.

(MEREDITH exits, with speed. BETHANY takes out a notepad from pocket and writes.)

BETHANY

“Drop dead? Call Meredith.” *(Puts notebook away, mimes knocking on a door and practices speaking to the imaginary person who has answered)* Good morning. I’m Bethany. Today, as you may have heard, people from around here . . . people from across the Midwest are gathering to form a human chain through a stretch of central Illinois to promote awareness of those who suffer from compulsive shopping disorder. This chain has been---this human chain has been in the planning for almost an entire year. Unfortunately . . . No . . . Interestingly, when we received a map of the area and planned our path, your house was not on it. Therefore, we need to ask your generous permission to allow the chain—the human chain—to cut through—to wind its way through—to a small section of the human chain to overlap your property. Your backyard. A small section of the human chain to overlap your backyard. *(A pause)* Thank you so much. We are all very grateful.

(She turns toward the back door of the house and as she takes her first two or three steps, JAN comes through the door, carrying a bag of grass seed and quickly approaches)

JAN

May I ask what you’re doing in the middle of nowhere?

BETHANY

I’m Bethany Bell.

JAN

Bethany Bell, I’m Jan Everly. What brings you to where Jesus left his sandals?

BETHANY

Isn’t this your yard?

JAN

It is.

BETHANY

Jesus? Was here?

JAN

Yeah. And Moses too.

BETHANY

(a moment very much at sea) I'm Bethany Bell. *(JAN stares, drops the bag)* Oh, I did that part. Okay. Well, today, as you may have heard—

JAN

I haven't.

(As this conversation continues, JAN works around the yard, moving things, raking, etc. It doesn't look any better for the effort)

BETHANY

Oh. *(Struggling)* Would you mind a lot if some people stood in your yard?

JAN

Who?

BETHANY

Volunteers.

JAN

I don't need help with anything.

BETHANY

Oh, they won't be helping.

JAN

They're volunteers?

BETHANY

Yes, but they don't volunteer to help. They just volunteer to stand.

JAN

They volunteer to stand?

BETHANY

Um, yes. And hold hands, for a short period.

JAN

Can't they find a more fruitful way to spend their volunteering hours?

BETHANY

This is fruitful. It's a show of force. Not force really. Not like violence. Not like drive by shootings, which I, for one, find very upsetting. It's more like people coming together to stand united for something.

JAN

And what exactly are we standing for this morning?

BETHANY

We are standing together to promote awareness of compulsive shopping.

JAN

Shopping?

BETHANY

Yes. There are millions of people in America who suffer from an addiction to shopping. Mostly women, but some men. The men are mostly homosexual, but some are not. And these millions of women and gay and straight men . . . oh wait . . . I suppose some of the women are gay too. So all these women and men who have sex with men and women, although that has nothing to do with their problem, I don't think, well, they struggle with their inability to stop purchasing things. Look in their closets! They may have up to six pairs of white pants! Some with the tags still on. Look in their linen closets! They may have bedding that they've never ever used! It may not even fit any bed in their home! But it was on sale! They couldn't pass it up! They can't stop shopping! It's a real problem!

JAN

Seems to me they could just stay out of the store.

BETHANY

You would think, wouldn't you? But I guess they can't.

JAN

You're not one?

BETHANY

(recoiling) Oh no! I just helped organize the chain. But there are lots of them coming, if you want to see what they look like.

JAN

And you're going to stand in my yard to try to help these people?

BETHANY

Yes, if it's okay with you.

JAN

It's not something I'd stand for myself, but I'll defend to the death your right to stand for it.

BETHANY

Mrs. Everly, I don't really anticipate asking you to defend us to the death.

JAN

Call me Jan.

BETHANY

Thanks, Jan. *(Pause)* So, can we stand in your yard?

JAN

It's going to be hot today.

BETHANY

We know.

JAN

Who's we?

BETHANY

Me. I know that it's going to be hot. I'm sure everyone involved with the human chain knows it's going to be hot.

JAN

I won't be supplying you all with food and drinks.

BETHANY

We have a beverage and first aid cart coming around.

JAN

I did my time as a waitress, young lady. Something really nice happened to me, too. I was living in a big city, working in a little diner. This police officer I waited on all the time, he always sat at the counter, and one day he couldn't leave me a tip. He said I could share the winnings from his lottery ticket, you know, that he had spent my tip money on. I just laughed, but then, you know what? He won. And we split a whole lot of money. I can't remember if we fell in love or not, but the winning of the money was very nice.

BETHANY

You won't need to wait on anyone, at all.

JAN

As long as you understand that.

BETHANY

We do. I do. I do.

JAN

How long are you going to be in the yard?

BETHANY

We're gathering in the next twenty minutes or so, and then we have to get organized and hold hands for several minutes without letting go. (*Referring to pocket notebook*) In about an hour, there will be media here to document the event.

JAN

(*disapprovingly*) Hmmmmmmmm.

BETHANY

What's the matter?

JAN

My nephew Davey is coming over to seed the lawn at 9.

BETHANY

Oh dear. Do you think he'll be done by 9:15?

JAN

I don't think he'll have started yet. He's always late.

BETHANY

We'll be real careful not to get in his way.

JAN

You're going to be in the yard. He's going to be in the yard. The yard's not that big. My yard growing up was really big. My father heard a voice when I was small and that voice said he ought to carve a baseball field out in the back. My mother was afraid but she ended up agreeing to it. And then, you know what? People came from all over to look at that baseball field. And the last thing I remember about that is a whole bunch of car headlights, lined up for miles, all down the interstate!

BETHANY

Maybe your nephew will be really late and we'll be finished by the time he gets here.

JAN

Let's just see how the day goes.

BETHANY

Okay. I'm okay with that, but can we maybe please lie to Meredith and tell her it's completely under control and that I've done a really excellent job of communicating with you and you support the cause and are maybe proud to be a part of things?

JAN

Who's Meredith?

BETHANY

She's, like, the boss of the human chain.

JAN

Oh. Must have been a heck of a thing to put together.

BETHANY

She really likes to call emergency meetings.

JAN

I admire people who do charity work.

BETHANY

You wouldn't admire her. If you meet her, I doubt admiration will be the feeling you feel.

JAN

Really?

BETHANY

You would think that someone that does charity work like this would be, like, super nice, but she's not.

JAN

No?

BETHANY

She lacks compassion.

JAN

For the shoppers?

BETHANY

For me.

JAN

I see.

BETHANY

She's also my ex-almost-sister-in-law.

JAN

Your what now?

BETHANY

I almost married her brother. Thomas.

JAN

Who called off the wedding?

BETHANY

Meredith.

JAN

Oh my.

BETHANY

She doesn't think I'm good enough for Thomas, or smart enough, or pretty enough, or ambitious enough, or common sensical enough, or—oh, here she comes!

(MEREDITH enters from the direction she exited earlier)

MEREDITH

Oh good, Bethany, your people are starting to show up?

BETHANY

Oh, um, no.

JAN

I'm Jan Everly.

MEREDITH

Well, thanks, Jan, for participating in the chain.

JAN

You can call me Mrs. Everly, and I'm not.

MEREDITH

Well then, what are you doing here?

JAN

Standing in my yard.

MEREDITH

I'm not—oh! *(Instantly irate)* Bethany! Why didn't you tell me this is the lady from the house?

JAN

You should know that Bethany was very persuasive in her communication with me. She laid everything out very clearly and I have agreed to let the goings on go on.

MEREDITH

The committee sincerely thanks you, Mrs. Everly.

JAN

You're sincerely welcome. I'm going to go finish my coffee. *(Exits into house)*

MEREDITH

Oh! One second! Is there any way you could pick up your yard a bit?

JAN

Excuse me?

MEREDITH

Can you like, move some of this stuff into your garage or something?

JAN

This yard will stay exactly how it is.

MEREDITH

Really? *(No response)* Can we clean it?

JAN

If you move a single thing in this yard, I'll have you arrested for trespassing. *(JAN exits)*

MEREDITH

What a bitch!

BETHANY

Don't say that!

MEREDITH

She's not going to hear me.

BETHANY

But she's nice. She's totally letting us use her yard.

MEREDITH

Like she really had any choice. You can't stop the human chain, Bethany. Now, every other captain has people here. You do know that you're responsible for covering 100 yards.

BETHANY

Well duh.

MEREDITH

Don't "duh" me, Bethany. You better have it together.

BETHANY

I will. They're all coming.

MEREDITH

Well, I see some of the busses pulling onto the shoulder so—

BETHANY

Busses?

MEREDITH

Some of the captains hired busses for their volunteers. Or had busses donated, in most cases.

BETHANY

Why did they need busses?

MEREDITH

It's just easier to get 60 people here at once on a bus, have them all check in on a bus, file off the bus in the order they're going to stand in and then when they are done, load them all back on to the bus and get them out of here. You obviously didn't get a bus, so whatever, we'll have like 45 cars on the shoulder of the road, thanks to Captain Bethany. That'll add a nice touch to the helicopter images. Great job.

(MEREDITH exits in a huff. BETHANY shows signs of a mental struggle, then stands with her arms outstretched as if she is holding hands with people on both sides of her. She looks side to side, calculating the distance between her hands. She attempts to lengthen said distance by leaning, stretching, contorting, whatever. DAVEY enters. He is 18-20)

DAVEY

Aunt Jan! There's a really big bird in the yard.

BETHANY

Oh God! I'm not a bird!

DAVEY

Really?

BETHANY

(startled by his sudden appearance) Um, no I'm really not. I'm a captain of this portion of the human chain.

DAVEY

That sounds scary.

BETHANY

Oh it's not. It's just people holding hands.

DAVEY

In my aunt's yard?

BETHANY

Yes, but by mistake. My mistake apparently. But she said it was okay. Jan did.

DAVEY

She tell you I'm seeding the lawn?

BETHANY

She did but not yet. She said at 9, but you're always late.

DAVEY

Well, today I'm early. Fifteen minutes early.

BETHANY

Okay. *(Pause)* How many people do you think it would take to cover a distance of 100 yards?

DAVEY

A football field?

BETHANY

No, just any 100 yards.

DAVEY

That's as long as a football field. *(BETHANY shrugs)* Figure a person for every two yards. Wait, if your wing span is the same as your height . . .

BETHANY

Exactly what I figured.

DAVEY

You can't expect your people to average six feet tall. You got little kids coming?

BETHANY

No. 18 and up.

DAVEY

Good. But you still can't figure them to all be six feet tall. There's probably a lot of girls, right?

BETHANY

Some.

DAVEY

So just to be safe, figure your height or wing span average is five feet. So you need sixty people.

BETHANY

No. Twenty.

DAVEY

It's 60, actually.

BETHANY

Five goes into one hundred twenty times.

DAVEY

So twenty people gets you to one hundred feet, but your dealing with yards, so you have to times it by three. Twenty times three is sixty.

BETHANY

Say that again.

DAVEY

You want to cover a hundred yards, that's three hundred feet. Average wing span of your hand holders is five feet. Five goes into three hundred sixty times. You need sixty people.

(BETHANY computes, then slowly comes to the realization that she has miscalculated terribly. SHE screams in horror. DAVEY winces. JAN comes bolting out the back door.)

JAN

What the devil is going on out here?

DAVEY

Bad math, I think.

JAN

On whose part?

BETHANY
Mine! Mine! I did it wrong!

JAN
Can we fix it?

BETHANY
Not now!

JAN
Davey?

DAVEY
It seems this girl's only got a third of the people she needs.

BETHANY
I did feet instead of yards. Feet instead of yards!

DAVEY
So just find the person in charge and tell him to send any extra people your way.

BETHANY
(to JAN, in terror) Meredith!

JAN
We won't be dealing with the person in charge, Davey. Get in the house and start calling some of your friends.

DAVEY
They're not awake. We drove the whip last night until –

JAN
Wake them. How many more people do we need?

BETHANY
Forty!

JAN
Boy oh boy.
(DAVEY shrugs and exits into the house. JAN moves to BETHANY)

This is quite the pickle. And I don't know that we can get forty, but maybe we can just stretch.

BETHANY
Thank you. Thank you for helping me.

JAN

Do you have any other friends you can call? Ones you didn't ask when you thought you didn't need them?

BETHANY

No. *(pause)* I don't really have that many friends. Most of my friends were Thomas' friends and they sort of stuck with him after the wedding got cancelled.

JAN

Well then, who do you have coming?

BETHANY

My brother and three of my cousins, my mom and six girls from her work, and the compulsive shoppers support group that meets in the basement of my church. They have about 10 members.

JAN

So counting you, that's 22 people.

BETHANY

Yes. I got what I thought were two extra people, in case anyone didn't show up.

JAN

And now counting me and Davey, you're at 24.

BETHANY

Really? You'll do it? You don't have to. What about seeding the lawn?

JAN

The lawn will be here tomorrow, the chance to help won't.

BETHANY

Thank you so much.

JAN

Now you've still got work to do. Think. Who else can you call? Think now. *(BETHANY thinks hard and can't come up with anything)* What about Thomas?

BETHANY

What?!?!

JAN

He was going to marry you—I think he might be able to do this small thing for you.

BETHANY

He would. I know he would.

JAN

Then call him.

BETHANY

But if Meredith sees him here, she'll bury me alive.

JAN

Bethany, don't exaggerate.

BETHANY

I'm not. She said, "If I see you with my brother again, I'll bury you alive."

JAN

Oh dear. What do you think she'll do to you if the human chain fails because of you?

BETHANY

Well, she said she'd set me on fire.

JAN

Which would you prefer?

BETHANY

I might be able to dig myself out if she buries me alive. I don't know if I could put myself out if I was on fire. Unless we were near a lake.

JAN

Well there used to be a creek about two minutes into the woods, but it's been dry several years now. Call him. See if you can't get him to help you. I bet he will.

BETHANY

(taking out cell phone) Okay.

JAN

I'll go in and see if Davey's made any progress.

(JAN exits into house, BETHANY dials)

BETHANY

Please let it be voice mail. Please let it be voice mail. Don't answer, don't answer, don't answer. *(Eyes bright, smile—it is voicemail)* Hello Thomas, it's me. I was wondering if there was any chance you might be able to come down to Farmer City and help us out with the human chain thingy. We are a little short on people and—oh shoot. *(Big breath)* I screwed up, Thomas, and I'm going to be in big trouble if I don't get more people here right away. If you could come it'd be awesome. You just have to get on 74 West and get to Route 54 and you should see us. Oh, I hope you can come. If you can't come, that's okay. But please never mention this to Meredith. That I called you. She'll get really

mad. On that note, if you do come here, maybe you should wear a disguise, because I don't want her to see you here and get mad at you. So maybe I'll see you here, but if I do and you are in a disguise, please tell me who you are so I know. I would feel awful if you were here and I didn't recognize you.

(JAN has come into the yard)

JAN

Were you able to reach him?

BETHANY

No. I left a message.

JAN

Davey's got Mickey and AJ coming over. They should be here in minutes.

BETHANY

Are they big? Can you estimate their wing spans?

JAN

No, I cannot. But they are fairly large sized boys.

BETHANY

Taller than 5 feet?

JAN

Absolutely. Both much taller than me.

BETHANY

That's really good.

(DAVEY enters, carrying a full size, fairly lifelike scarecrow in front of him)

DAVEY

Do you have to be human to be in the human chain?

BETHANY

I couldn't find my captain's information sheet yesterday!

JAN

Davey, that's a bright idea!

BETHANY

What?

JAN

Fill the empty spots with scarecrows! I had a strange dream about a scarecrow once. We had to follow a golden path to get help, and I missed that scarecrow the most of all!

DAVEY

(completely ignoring his aunt) AJ and Mickey are bringing ones from their houses. AJ thought he might have two!

JAN

That's four more people!

BETHANY

But they're not people.

JAN

Has Meredith made any direct threats regarding the use of scarecrows?

BETHANY

No. I'd remember that.

JAN

Well, they're shaped like people, and they will fill empty spots. I don't think you're in much of a position to complain about your volunteers not being alive.

BETHANY

You're right. Do you think you'd be able to tell he's not real from a helicopter?

DAVEY

No way.

BETHANY

Jan?

JAN

I think he'll look as alive as the people on either side of him.

BETHANY

Okay then.

DAVEY

We need to stuff in some extra straw, though, get him less floppy.

JAN

Well, that's fine. We can probably throw together a couple more, if you go grab some of your mom's old clothes.

DAVEY

Do you think she'd mind?

JAN

My sister was a do-gooder, Davey. I think she'd like to help out.

DAVEY

You're right.

(DAVEY exits into house)

BETHANY

Davey's mom lives here?

JAN

She lived here.

BETHANY

She left her son?

JAN

She died last year.

BETHANY

Oh. I'm really sorry. That was rude. I'm sorry you lost your sister.

JAN

This was her house. It wasn't exactly here, though. Remember when this county flooded last year?

BETHANY

Sort of.

JAN

Well, we lost my sister, Davey's mother in that flood. And the foundation of her house shifted in the high water. We salvaged the house, but we had to move it from the original foundation. We put it here.

BETHANY

Which is why it wasn't on the committee's map.

JAN

I would guess that's right.

(DAVEY enters with an armful of women's clothes, and 3 scarecrows)

DAVEY

My boys showed up, and look what they brought!

JAN

Wonderful. Be sure you thank them for coming.

BETHANY

Really thank them! I brought snack cakes for my volunteers and they can have first crack at them.

DAVEY

That's good. I don't think they've had breakfast.

BETHANY

Where are they?

DAVEY

They saw some good looking girls, over towards the trees, so they went to do some standing over there.

BETHANY

That's not my territory! My hundred yards stops at the pole with the red flag! What if they don't come back?

JAN

Davey, will you please get us some more straw, and then explain the situation to Mickey and AJ?

DAVEY

No problem. They'll understand, but they'll still probably try to take those girls out for lunch.

(DAVEY exits to get straw)

JAN

We're getting there.

BETHANY

Only 32 more people to find.

JAN

We've got four scarecrows! And we'll get four more made.

BETHANY

So we're still short 24.

JAN

We're almost half way.

BETHANY

We've only got about half an hour before the news-copter.

JAN

Let's put together some outfits.

(As JAN and BETHANY sort clothes, DAVEY returns with a wheelbarrow full of straw)

DAVEY

Here's the straw!

JAN

Let's get to work.

DAVE

I'll be back. *(Calling offstage, as he exits toward Mickey and AJ)* Mickey! AJ, you gotta stay on this side of that pole!

(The work begins now and proceeds as necessary)

BETHANY

He's really nice.

JAN

Davey's a good boy. It's hard to lose your mom at any time, but he was barely 18, and I think that's just too soon.

BETHANY

Did Davey get along with his mom?

JAN

He did. How about you? Do you get along with yours?

BETHANY

Pretty much. *(Holding up a pair of pants)* These still have the tags on them. Are you sure we should use them?

JAN

My sister doesn't need them anymore. *(Pause)* And besides, *(holding up an identical pair of pants)* So do these.

(BETHANY takes a minute sifting through the pile of clothes, realizing that there are multiple identical items, most with the tags still on, never worn)

BETHANY

Holy smokes.

JAN

My sister struggled.

BETHANY

I'll say!

OFF STAGE WOMAN'S VOICE

Boots! Hey, Boots!

BETHANY

(looking toward the voice) Oh, speaking of moms, there's mine! And her friends are with her! I'll be right back.

(BETHANY runs off stage to the voice. JAN breathes deeply, holds a shirt to her face, smells it.)

JAN

Smells like the mall.

(JAN collects herself, and proceeds to stuff straw into a pair of pants, DAVEY enters)

DAVEY

Everything's square with AJ and Mick. They want to stay by those girls for a while, but they know where the boundary line is. Need help?

JAN

We need to work fast.

DAVEY

Since it's woman's clothes, do we have to give them boobs?

JAN

David Michael Starman! *(Thoughtful pause)* Probably yes. But what they really need is arms—long, long arms.

DAVEY

So AJ asked me, and I didn't know—why are we standing in a line with these people, and scarecrows?

JAN

To help people who can't stop shopping.

DAVEY

(after a pause) Really?

JAN

Yes. Apparently, some people have a real problem.

DAVEY

Really?

JAN

Apparently, there are other people who do this.

DAVEY

That's something.

JAN

Sometimes you have to try hard to do some good, and sometimes the chance to do good falls right in your lap. When I was on a team in the All American Girls Baseball League, we had a manager named Jimmy, and he was a nasty drunk—

DAVEY

I'm glad we're using all this stuff for something. I couldn't throw it away—

JAN

Me neither.

DAVEY

But this seems like a good way to go.

JAN

I agree.

(They work for a moment, stuffing clothes. BRENDAN enters from the side of the stage opposite where BETHANY left)

BRENDAN

Excuse, me? I'm looking for my sister. Her name's Bethany—

JAN

Sure! I'm Jan Everly. This is my nephew Davey—

DAVEY

“Dave” is fine.

BRENDAN

I'm Brendan Bell. Nice to meet you.

JAN

Your sister's in a bit of a jam. She's about 30 people short.

BRENDAN

Really?

DAVEY

Scarecrows are gonna fill some of the empty spots.

BRENDAN

Can't she just steal some standers from other groups? I'm sure some people have extras.

JAN

I'm sure of that as well, but Bethany seems very worried about upsetting her supervisor. She'd rather we deal with this on the hush hush. Do you have anyone you can call?

BRENDAN

To stand here?

JAN

They need to get here quickly.

BRENDAN

Sure. I'll make a few calls. *(takes out a phone)*

JAN

Good. As long as we can keep Meredith out of Bethany's hair, the better off we'll all be.

BRENDAN

I'm sorry. *(puts phone away)* Did you say Meredith?

DAVEY

That's the supervisor girl. I guess she's kind of psycho.

BRENDAN

Have you met this broad?

DAVEY

No.

JAN

I have.

BRENDAN

Okay. “Kind of psycho” does not begin to touch on approaching the particular brand of crazy that Meredith is. She’s the poster girl for (*cartoon like sounds and gestures indicating crazy*).

DAVEY

Bethany seems super afraid of her.

BRENDAN

By the end of the day, you will be too. Meredith feels like if she’s not pushing everybody, nothing will get done. (*a pause filled with thinking*) Listen, any way I can borrow some of those clothes?

DAVEY

These are all women’s clothes.

BRENDAN

That’s great. Any XLs?

JAN

We’ve got every size from 4 to 26.

BRENDAN

Excellent.

(*He begins scouting through the clothes pile*)

Some of these are brand new.

JAN

Most of them are.

BRENDAN

Is it okay if I wear them?

JAN

I suppose.

BRENDAN

Believe me. I need to change if I’m going to stick around and help my sister. (*He begins changing into women’s clothes*) Man, I didn’t realize Meredith was a part of this thing. Poor Bethany. Hold on. Does that mean Thomas is here?

JAN

He wasn’t supposed to be, but I convinced Bethany to call him when she realized she needed extra people.

BRENDAN

He'll probably come. He's a good kid. He just can't stand up to his sister. Not many people can.

DAVEY

Does dressing as a woman count as standing up to her?

BRENDAN

No. No, man. This is the precaution I have to take because I did stand up to her. Now she's after me.

JAN

(skeptical) Really?

BRENDAN

Meredith and I were briefly . . . involved. You know, I wouldn't even say involved. We never went out on dates or anything. I never, like, bought her any food. I just drove her home from a lot of places we happened to end up together. I might describe it as a "curbside romance."

JAN

I see.

DAVEY

Wow.

BRENDAN

There came a time, pretty quickly, actually, when Meredith sort of expected more than I was willing to give. No, wait. That's not even true. She had it set in her mind that I was giving her everything she wanted.

JAN

And?

BRENDAN

And I thought I was. But I was also giving a few other girls everything they wanted.

DAVEY

Strong.

JAN

Davey!

BRENDAN

Meredith got suspicious, and rightly so. Truly, I didn't think we were anything but what we actually were. But she did.

JAN

So?

BRENDAN

So get this. This little bit will tell you exactly what a cuckoo she is. She got her hands on my phone and programmed it to forward all my messages to her phone. Then she'd listen to them and forward them back to me, unless they were other girls.

DAVEY

And they were.

BRENDAN

Of course they were!! But I would not be intimidated. I stood right in front of her and said, "Of course I'm seeing other girls, Meredith. We are hardly seeing each other. In fact, when we're together, I'm usually so drunk that I'm seeing two of you! Half the time, I'm looking at a you that isn't even there!"

JAN

She didn't take that very well.

BRENDAN

No. She tried to shove my phone down my throat. But I have a very active gag reflex and I simply cannot be choked. *(A pause while he adjusts the final elements of his outfit)* But now she wants to kill me. How do I look?

JAN

You remind me of my father.

BRENDAN

How's that?

JAN

When I was a girl, my parents were estranged. My father moved out, but he disguised himself as a lady and moved back in by pretending to be Mrs. Sproutwire and taking care of all the kids for her while she ran the farm. They eventually reunited!

DAVEY

You look very womanly. Except for your head.

BRENDAN

I probably need a hat of some kind. Is that a possibility?

JAN

We can rustle up something, I imagine.

DAVEY

In the garage rafters, I think there's a box of hats.

JAN

I'll come with you, hold the ladder.

DAVEY

Lay low, Brendan.

BRENDAN

Will do.

(JAN and DAVEY exit to garage. BRENDAN rifles through clothes, finding a scarf and tying it around his head, sunglasses and putting them on. BETHANY returns. BRENDAN has his back to her.)

BETHANY

Um, hello? Are you here for the chain? *(BRENDAN turns, she realizes he is a man, mistakes him for Thomas in disguise)* You came? You got here so quickly! *(She runs to him, embraces him)* Thank you for doing this!

BRENDAN

Bethany? It's me.

BETHANY

Brendan?

BRENDAN

Yeah.

BETHANY

Why are you wearing women's clothing? Does mom know you dress like that?

BRENDAN

It's just for right now, Beth. I talked to that Jan lady, and her nephew. They said I could use some of these and they went to find me a hat.

BETHANY

Why?

BRENDAN

Oh, you know . . . it's like . . . a few months ago . . . there's just someone that can't find out I'm here.

BETHANY

Did you skip work?

BRENDAN

I did. I called in sick to come here and my boss, he shouldn't find out I don't have the flu!

BETHANY

I know! He's such a jerk. I'm glad you came, but if he sees you on t.v. he's gonna be really mad.

BRENDAN

We're going on t.v.?

BETHANY

Not to be interviewed or anything. Just a camera that's going to drive down the length of the whole human chain. But you can't wave. You have to keep holding hands for the t.v. part.

BRENDAN

Okay. Is mom here?

BETHANY

She's with her friends over there. They're going to be the first part of my section. You know I don't have enough people, right?

BRENDAN

I do. Jan told me.

BETHANY

I called Thomas. I thought you were him in disguise.

BRENDAN

Why would he be in disguise?

BETHANY

Because if Meredith sees him here helping me, she'll get really mad, you know? He was supposed to be a captain, but he quit after she cancelled the wedding. I think she's taking it out on me. I don't think she wants me to do well.

BRENDAN

I think you need to tell her to go to hell. Please swear today is the last day you'll have anything to do with her.

BETHANY

Not likely.

BRENDAN

Why not?

BETHANY

She already signed me up for decorating for the 5K to build a new library. Run for Reading, it's called, or Booking for Books. I can't remember which they picked.

BRENDAN

Tell her you're not doing it.

BETHANY

No. I'd feel bad leaving. I'd feel guilty. Oh! It's Laps for Literature!

BRENDAN

You remember what mom used to say? If you got . . .

BETHANY

If I got malaria, they'd find a way to do it without me. But I didn't get malaria. I have no excuse.

BRENDAN

Except fear of Meredith's wrath.

BETHANY

Basically yes.

BRENDAN

Bethany, I need to come clean with you.

BETHANY

Shoot! Here comes Meredith! Hide the scarecrows!

(BRENDAN dumps clothing over hay and straightens himself up)

MEREDITH

Bethany, where the hell are all your people?!?

BETHANY

Here's one! Meredith, this is—

BRENDAN

(a bad Irish brogue and high-pitched "lady voice") Matilda! Matilda McDougal!

MEREDITH

Lovely. Do you shop?

BRENDAN

I'm sorry?

MEREDITH

Are you hard of hearing?

BRENDAN

No.

BETHANY

(puzzled, but instinctively protecting her brother) Yes, Meredith. Matilda has a shopping problem, but she doesn't like to talk much about it.

MEREDITH

Can't fix the problem til you acknowledge it!

BRENDAN

Sure and beggorah! Let's rally the troops around me and start the hand holdin' then!

BETHANY

Matilda—I see the other members of your support group coming up. They're over by mom. My mom. See my mom down there by the red flag? That's my mom. Can you go there and greet the rest of the group? Just get them set up right after my mom and her friends.

BRENDAN

I'll be off now!

(BRENDAN exits. MEREDITH stares after him)

MEREDITH

Um, Bethany?

BETHANY

Yes?

MEREDITH

You know that's a man, right?

BETHANY

Of course I do.

MEREDITH

I'm just saying . . .

BETHANY

I know.

MEREDITH

That's the worst transvestite I've ever seen. If anything, she needs to shop more!

BETHANY

He's doing his best.

MEREDITH

Then it's time to give it up. *(A pause)* What's with these clothes?

BETHANY

Well, they came from inside Jan's house.

MEREDITH

What?!? I asked that nut job to clean up around here, and she's dumping more crap on the lawn? Fantastic! Of all the people to be in our way, we get some crazy clothes-horse running a perpetual yard sale. And, to top it all off, she lands inside your territory! You have to stand up to this lady, Bethany. Every other captain has things in shape. Maybe you and that Mick Tranny can just lock her in her house or something. Fix this. Can you fix this?

BETHANY

It's going to be fine.

MEREDITH

I'll believe that—

(She stops mid-sentence and stares at JAN and DAVEY, entering lugging a beat up cardboard box filled with hats of all sorts)

JAN

I've had these hats in the garage over 15 years!

DAVEY

I've never even seen them before.

MEREDITH

You know, I think this might be a really bad time for a stroll down memory lane.

DAVEY

Who are you?

(MEREDITH rolls her eyes and sighs heavily—who on earth wouldn't know who she is)

BETHANY

Davey, this is Meredith. She's my supervisor.

DAVEY

Oh yeah. You're legendary.

MEREDITH

Damn right I am. Can I ask why you're hauling your Salvation Army donation box to the middle of your lawn?

BETHANY

It's their lawn, Meredith. They can do what they want.

MEREDITH

They can do what they want after 10 o'clock.

JAN

Nothing's going to get in the way of your standers, Bethany.

BETHANY

I know, Jan. I'm fine with it.

MEREDITH

I'm not. It's going to look brutal on tv.

BETHANY

It's my section.

MEREDITH

It's my chain.

JAN

(stepping in) My thought was, actually, that some of the shoppers might want some of these things. Some of the clothes here are brand new. I thought we'd maybe have a little give-away.

MEREDITH

Are you crazy? These people don't need more shit in their closets! They need to pare down!

JAN

I thought the problem was them spending all their money.

MEREDITH

We don't object to them spending money! Who gives a crap about that? We object to them being mentally ill!

DAVEY

You're against the mentally ill?

MEREDITH

Who isn't?!?

JAN

And standing in a big line is going to fix that how?

MEREDITH

We're raising awareness! People will see this human chain—they will become aware of the mental illness suffered by those who shop compulsively, and then they can do something about it!

DAVEY

Like what?

MEREDITH

Like stand in the next goddam human chain that some good-hearted person puts together!

JAN

That'll get us somewhere.

MEREDITH

I don't see you doing anything about it.

JAN

I'm giving you my lawn.

MEREDITH

Oh, God bless you for that. We're all exceedingly grateful!
(MEREDITH exits in a huff)

BETHANY

I actually am exceedingly grateful.

JAN

I know, dear. But I think you might have to do me a favor in return.

BETHANY

Do I have to do it today? Because I don't think I can handle anything else right now.

JAN

You have to promise to get yourself away from that girl.

BETHANY

That's almost impossible.

JAN

What good does she bring to your life?

BETHANY

Well . . . *(a long time to come up with something)* She signs me up for a lot of stuff.

DAVEY

Can't you sign yourself up?

JAN

For different stuff than she signs up for?

BETHANY

I guess. But she's the boss of a lot of it.

JAN

There have to be some things she's not in charge of.

BETHANY

Probably.

JAN

We will work all morning for you. We will build a chain for you. But you have to promise me that you won't get mixed up with her again.

BETHANY

I promise that I'll try.

JAN

Very good.

BETHANY

Here's Matilda.

DAVEY

What?

(BRENDAN enters, JAN and DAVEY assemble scarecrows)

BRENDAN

She cruised right past me and didn't give a second look!

BETHANY

Why does it even matter? Anyway, she knows you're a man.

JAN

Bethany, Matilda, we're going to take a few of these "people" to the end of the section. We can't have them all in a row here.

BETHANY

Thanks, Jan. Thanks, Davey. If you could put them with my mom and her friends. And bring them some supplies. They can put together one or two, I bet. Did you talk to mom?

(JAN and DAVEY exit with some clothes, hay and all but 2 scarecrows)

BRENDAN

I did. She and her friends found six spare people in the next group over, and they said they'd be happy to spill over into your area. The cousins are here.

BETHANY

All three?

BRENDAN

Yep. And I have even better news, I called my fraternity brothers and they're coming.

BETHANY

(Throwing her arms around him) I love you! You're the very best brother!

BRENDAN

Don't get over excited. Most of them have left for the summer and the house isn't full. I'm guessing you'll get 10 or 12 guys. And 2 blow up dolls, if that's okay with you.

BETHANY

Dolls? They'll be too small.

BRENDAN

No. These are life size.

BETHANY

What would your fraternity brothers be doing with life size inflatable people?

BRENDAN

(pause) I don't know, Beth.

BETHANY

Me neither, but that's 12 to 14 more real and fake people than I had five minutes ago, so great!

BRENDAN

They had one stipulation, though. They'll need a copy of the video thing. They're on probation for not fulfilling their community service obligation and this could get them off the hook.

BETHANY

It's great! (*Pause*) So you probably want to change into man clothes then, if your friends are going to be here.

BRENDAN

They'll understand.

BETHANY

That you're hiding from your boss?

BRENDAN

The thing is . . . Beth, I'm actually hiding from Meredith.

BETHANY

She's scary.

BRENDAN

She and I, we . . . *know* each other.

BETHANY

What does that mean?

BRENDAN

We've spent some time together.

BETHANY

Where?

BRENDAN

In my car.

BETHANY

I see. Then what?

BRENDAN

I called it off.

BETHANY

Like she called off my wedding?

BRENDAN
Yeah.

BETHANY
She hates me because of you?

BRENDAN
She hates you because she was raised in a house where if you weren't bitching at somebody you weren't supposed to be talking.

BETHANY
Thomas isn't like her.

BRENDAN
He opted for the no talking route, Beth. Meredith is a stark raving crazy person who needs to have everyone in the world do what she thinks they should be doing. She hates you because it's the only way she knows how to be to people. But I'm sure I contributed to it.

BETHANY
Brendan!

BRENDAN
I'm sorry, Bethany.

BETHANY
And now you're hiding from her? Why?

BRENDAN
She's really horrible, Beth.

BETHANY
What did she say she would do to you the next time she saw you?

BRENDAN
Gouge my eyes out, fill the sockets with birdseed and tie me to a tree in the forest preserves.

BETHANY
That's meaner than anything she ever said to me. Here. *(Pushes box to him)* Have a hat.

BRENDAN
Thank you.

BETHANY
She's really screwed things up for us.

BRENDAN

I get the feeling there's a lot of people here who don't like her. There was some guy over there dressed like a clown. He was all jokey and juggly and then when Meredith rolled in, he just clammed up and walked away.

(JAN and DAVEY enter)

BETHANY

Could it have been Thomas?

BRENDAN

Well . . . maybe. He was kind of over-the-top, goofy, not really like Thomas. But when Meredith showed up, it was like someone hit him on the head—he got all slouchy and shuffly like Thomas does when she's around.

DAVEY

Your boyfriend is dressed up like a clown?

BETHANY

Former fiance. Maybe. He had to disguise himself so his sister doesn't see him around me.

DAVEY

Clowns upset me.

BETHANY

What?

DAVEY

Clowns upset me. Is he a sad clown?

BETHANY

All clowns are happy.

DAVEY

Not true. Some act happy, but they look sad. And that's the scariest kind of clown there is.

BRENDAN

He had, uh, like a tear drop painted on his cheek. And the area around his mouth was all white, but in the shape of a rainbow.

DAVEY

A frown?

BRENDAN

I guess.

DAVEY
Dammit!

JAN
Language, Davey.

DAVEY
I'm sorry.

JAN
Davey had a toy clown when he was a boy and one night its arms grew really long and tried to strangle him. Was that the same night that the tree burst through your window and dragged you out with its branches and tried to kill you? His parents didn't know that their brand new fancy house had been built on an old indian burial ground. And they moved the headstones—but not the bodies!!!!

DAVEY
I can't be out here with you when he gets here.

BETHANY
Thomas is really nice, Davey. And we need your arms.

DAVEY
That's great. I'm sure Thomas is nice. But I just don't truck with clowns.

JAN
Bethany is still short on people, Davey. Can you hold off being judgmental for one morning?

DAVEY
If it was prejudice, I would put it aside, Aunt Jan. Bethany? I swear I would. But this is fear. This is hyperventilating, sweating, shaking fear.

BETHANY
I understand.

DAVEY
Thank you.

BRENDAN
Won't your friends make fun of you?

DAVEY
Probably. Won't yours make fun of you?

BRENDAN

We do what we have to do.

DAVEY

You got that right.

JAN

Davey, what if you never see the clown?

DAVEY

I can't close my eyes that long.

JAN

But you could put a bag on your head.

DAVEY

I'll suffocate.

JAN

A paper sack—like for groceries.

DAVEY

Okay, but why would someone in this thing have a paper sack on his head?

(A moment of quiet reflection for all)

BETHANY

Because a compulsive shopper could be anyone. It might be your brother, or your cousin, or your grocery bagger . . .

JAN

Exactly. Shopper X.

BRENDAN

Like Malcolm X, but on a much smaller and less politically and socially significant scale.

DAVEY

Yeah. What he said.

BRENDAN

Here comes TomTom the Clown.

DAVEY

Crap! *(Grabs a paper bag from one of the boxes and pulls it down over his head)*

(THOMAS enters, in full clown regalia. All stare. BETHANY approaches)

BETHANY
Thomas? *(THOMAS nods)*

DAVEY
Is it him?

JAN
Yes.

DAVEY
Why didn't he answer?

(THOMAS gestures off stage, and indicates that MEREDITH is on her way here)

BRENDAN
He says Meredith is coming.

DAVEY
He didn't say anything!

BETHANY
He can't talk. She'll hear him.

DAVEY
Silent and sad? I'm doomed.

JAN
Just keep the bag on.

(MEREDITH enters)

BRENDAN
Top o' the mornin' to you lassie!

MEREDITH
Uh-huh. Bethany, are you in shape here?

BETHANY
Pretty much.

MEREDITH

We just got word that the drive by and the helicopter are going to happen at the same time. In roughly 10 minutes. Then they'll just photoshop the golf cart out of the helicopter footage or something.

BETHANY

That's great!

MEREDITH

It is what it is. Who's the circus reject? I saw him over there earlier.

BETHANY

That's Tom-Tom . . . I mean Tomahawk the clown.

MEREDITH

Are you kidding me?

BRENDAN

No, me girl! And a fine entertainment he's been too! We're havin' such a lovely time here with Bethany!

MEREDITH

You hired a clown named Tomahawk? I'm signing you up for a cultural sensitivity course.

DAVEY

He's a friend of ours.

MEREDITH

Who the hell are you?

DAVEY

It's Davey. We met earlier.

MEREDITH

(Grabbing at bag) Get this stupid thing off your head.

DAVEY

Stop! Get off me! I'm making a political statement, Meredith, about the universality of the plague of buying stuff when you don't need it but you have to because if you don't buy stuff you don't feel fulfilled. You can't see my face. I'm a compulsive shopper. I could be anyone.

MEREDITH

I like it. I think there's hope for you.

DAVEY

Bethany came up with it.

MEREDITH

Bull. Don't stand up for her. I'm signing you up for the aspiring activists fall luncheon. You're in charge of silverware. Okay, everyone. You need to start to assemble. Do you understand the path? Why am I doing this? Bethany, take over. I have to go electrocute the guy they sent to drive the golf cart. He's a complete idiot.

(MEREDITH exits.)

BETHANY

Okay, I'm the boss now. *(Giggling, reassured by the presence of THOMAS)* That's kind of funny.

JAN

We've done everything we can do, honey. Now we just have to stretch and hope.

BETHANY

Okay. You're right, right?

THOMAS

Beth, you're gonna do great. I know how hard you worked on this.

BETHANY

Thanks for coming.

(A shrug and smile from THOMAS, indicating, "Where else would I be?" She kisses him carefully on the mouth, then speaks with an authority we haven't heard before)

Let's get everybody in order.

BRENDAN

My boys just pulled up!

(BRENDAN runs off stage left, BETHANY off stage right, the others, except DAVEY gather up the scarecrows and sort of line up, BETHANY returns)

JAN

Thomas, I'm real glad you came out here today.

THOMAS

I couldn't let Bethany fail. She's the sweetest girl.

DAVEY

Then why the hell did you leave her?

THOMAS
It's hard to explain. My sister . . .

JAN
You need to do something about her.

THOMAS
I should probably ask my dad to talk to her.

JAN
No, son. *You* need to do something.

THOMAS
I do.

JAN
You're a grown man in a ridiculous disguise.

THOMAS
You're right.

JAN
You let the woman you love be intimidated by your own sister.

THOMAS
I know.

JAN
You should be ashamed.

THOMAS
I am.

DAVEY
Man up, Thomas. You clown.

THOMAS
Well, I have stood up to her. I quit this project after she called off the wedding.

JAN
Running from something isn't standing up to it.

THOMAS
It's just . . . whenever I upset her, she gets like my mom.

JAN

Do you want to be happy?

THOMAS

Yes.

JAN

Are you grown up enough to know what will make you happy?

THOMAS

Yes, I am.

BETHANY

(rushing in) Davey, here.

(She guides him to the right of the stage and sets him up with a scarecrow on his right. The idea is that the next person offstage is holding the other hand of the scarecrow and continuing the chain. DAVEY lifts his bag to see the set up, accidentally sees THOMAS and screams)

JAN

What the devil is wrong with you?!?

DAVEY

That's just so damn scary!!

BETHANY

There's no reason to lift up the bag!

DAVEY

It's hard not to know what's going on!

JAN

All right, you ninny! I'll stand with you and hold your hand, just in case he tries to get you. Is that okay with you, Bethany?

BETHANY

Yes, Jan, I think that will work out nicely. And then if you could hold this guy for me. *(Setting up a scarecrow next to JAN)* I'll go here in the middle. *(an airhorn sounds far off—the signal)* That's the signal! Hurry up! Brendan, come on!

BRENDAN

(entering dragging cheap blow-up doll dressed in fraternity house cast offs, ie flannel pants and a date party t-shirt) I brought my lady friend here. She's not all that wide, but we should be okay. *(grabs a scarecrow)* I'll get this guy then and connect up over here. Thomas, join up?

(BRENDAN goes to the stage left side and “connects” via the scarecrow to the next offstage person. THOMAS holds BRENDAN’s right hand. The line thus goes, SR to SL: scarecrow, Davey, Jan, scarecrow, Bethany, Thomas, blow up doll, Brendan, scarecrow. Width of playing area may dictate more or fewer fake people—adjust as necessary. There is a gap between BETHANY and THOMAS.)

BETHANY

Oh no!

JAN

Can’t you reach?

BRENDAN

Don’t let the little lady fall Thomas! She’s a little tipsy!

THOMAS

I’ve got her.

BETHANY

Don’t let the scarecrows come apart, we don’t have time to put them back together.

JAN

It’s going to be fine, Bethany! Nothing’s going to come apart.

BETHANY

But we’re not even together.

THOMAS

Brendan, you need to handle this one on your own for a second.

BRENDAN

She’s gonna go down!

THOMAS

I’m letting go. One, two, three!

(THOMAS lets go and BRENDAN struggles keeping the doll and the scarecrow upright. THOMAS runs to BETHANY)

BETHANY

What are you doing?

THOMAS

I love you. Hold on to this!

BETHANY
What?

THOMAS
Trust me!

(BETHANY takes the corner of his sleeve and from it begins to pull a long string of clown/magician style silk scarves. SHE stops when just a foot or so is out.)

BETHANY
Oh, Thomas! You've saved the whole day!

THOMAS
You did almost everything!

BETHANY
I love you!
(SHE kisses him passionately and without any feeling or thought but the love of him. SHE comes away from the kiss with her face slathered in greasepaint. SHE moves away slowly, pulling the scarves from his sleeve. They are connected and the strand is precisely the length it needs to be to cover the gap between them.)

JAN
Wow.

BETHANY
Isn't he the best?

JAN
He does love you!

BETHANY
You think?

JAN
I do.

DAVEY
What the hell's going on?

JAN
You should really see this!

DAVEY

What is it?

BRENDAN

We're not telling.

DAVEY

Well . . .

(DAVEY carefully lifts the bag, but what he sees is THOMAS, BETHANY [now in semi-white face] engaged in what seems to be a clown act or trick. He screams—a short burst)

Holy shit! They're multiplying!

JAN

Davey! Don't lose it now! You keep a grip on that scarecrow and you hold on to aunt Jan!

DAVEY

(Whining) Okay. Okay. There are no clowns. No clowns.

THOMAS

The golf cart's coming. Everyone be strong!

(All eyes stage right. The golf cart, driven by MEREDITH, with some kind of TV type camera affixed to the back, slowly rolls in. She sees Bethany's face as soon as she possibly can)

MEREDITH

What the hell is on your face, Bethany?!?

BETHANY

What?

(Distracted, MEREDITH runs the cart into a box of clothing. The engine dies. MEREDITH attempts to restart it, fails, keeps trying through the next exchange)

MEREDITH

Dammit! What've you got going here? What the hell is on your face? Were you making out with the clown?

THOMAS

Meredith, stop.

MEREDITH

What?

THOMAS

Stop yelling at Bethany.

MEREDITH

Listen here, Barnum and Badass, you just shut—Thomas?

(Caught. His clown eyes widen in terror. MEREDITH gives up on starting the cart and gets off and approaches him. The human chain remains in tact.)

What the shit are you doing here?

THOMAS

Holding hands.

MEREDITH

For who?

THOMAS

For the shoppers?

MEREDITH

Bull.

THOMAS

For Bethany. Bethany asked me to come and I did. Because I care about her and I wanted her to succeed.

MEREDITH

Bethany's not good enough for you. Sorry, it's true. It's too bad you can't cover your ears for this, Bethany, but this chain better stay together.

THOMAS

Stop it, Meredith.

MEREDITH

She's almost retarded, Thomas. I let her be a captain to prove to you what a colossal flop she is. She didn't realize her her captain's manual was missing until yesterday! I swiped that thing after the first meeting just to see how long it would take her to figure out it was gone. She's positively brainless! She can't do anything for herself. Every bit of productive action she takes is directed by someone else, usually me.

DAVEY

You're a bitch.

MEREDITH

Who said that? *(A pause)* Baghead? I put a lot of stock in the opinion of someone with a bag on his head.

JAN

He's right. Bag or no bag.

THOMAS

You are a bitch, Meredith.

MEREDITH

You've got the brain of a kindergarten crack baby.

BRENDAN

Wow. You're a bitch.

MEREDITH

Easy tranny. If you think you're passing– (*eyes flare*) Brendan?

BRENDAN

Get the hell off my sister and back on your little cart and let's wrap this shit up.

MEREDITH

(a complete attitude shift, she approaches him, the sound of a helicopter overhead, she speaks gently, with excitement) Oh wow! It's been so long since I've even seen you! What have you been–

(She sucker punches him and he folds forward, collapsing to his knees, the wind knocked out of him. The chain begins to crumble)

BETHANY

Bitch!!!

(We flip into slo-mo, and silence, but for rising helicopter sounds. BETHANY leaps on MEREDITH. Bowls her over. There is wrestling. JAN endeavors to pry them all apart. THOMAS gets in the mix, as does DAVEY, occasionally peeking out of his bag to make sure he is hitting the right person (he usually is not). Helicopter sounds grow louder and then softer as the following is heard, in an anchorman or woman voiceover)

VOICEOVER

In Farmer City, Illinois today, a charity event went horribly awry when plans to form a human chain faltered. The mile long string of hand holders, uniting to bring awareness to a cause unknown at this time, devolved into a wild brawl involving clowns, cross dressers, sex toys, event supervisors and one apparently masked man. We've got chopper footage to share with you, but let's preface it with a warning, it does get pretty ugly . . .

Lights fade. End of play.