

# BEEF JUNKIES

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A one-act dark comedy by  
Jonathan Dorf

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

COWBOY, mid to late 20s and the smarter half of a Bonnie and Clyde team.

COWGIRL, same age and his companion who is addicted to beef.

SHEPHERD, younger than the others, the somewhat naïve keeper of Betty the Bovine.

## SETTING

A road somewhere in suburbia, the near future, just before five o'clock in the afternoon.

## NOTES

The landscape of the play is described as a "not quite apocalyptic" suburbia. While I leave the details of "not quite" to each individual production, I do want to clarify the use of the phrase "nuclear family" in the play. In this case, "nuclear" is intended to describe a "traditional" family structure (mother, father, children), rather than nuclear in the atomic energy sense of the word. Having said that, if you're dead-set on an irradiated landscape, take your best shot.

There are a few instances of mature language. Depending on the needs of your production, feel free to replace them with the text in [ ] that follows.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The following note should be part of any program: "Originally produced by the Pittsburgh New Works Festival."

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*(A deserted road on the outskirts of a not quite apocalyptic suburbia. Just before 5:00 PM in the not so distant future. COWGIRL, late twenties and the Bonnie half of a Bonnie and Clyde team, holds a syringe. Her hands shake. COWBOY, about her age, holds a backpack.)*

**COWGIRL:** I can't do it. My hands are shakin' too bad.

**COWBOY:** I got you, baby.

*(Cowboy puts his hands on hers to steady them.)*

**COWGIRL:** You'll miss the vein.

**COWBOY:** I'll be careful.

**COWGIRL:** Don't miss the vein. I'll bleed.

**COWBOY:** You won't bleed if I miss the vein.

**COWGIRL:** You'll hit something else. *(Beat.)* Come on!

**COWBOY:** You said don't help you.

**COWGIRL:** Can't you see I'm shakin'?

**COWBOY:** You want me to help you or not?

**COWGIRL:** Just find the vein!

*(Cowboy grabs the syringe.)*

**COWBOY:** Hold still.

**COWGIRL:** I wouldn't need the hit if I wasn't shakin'.

**COWBOY:** Hold your breath.

**COWGIRL:** What the hell's that gonna do?

**COWBOY:** Maybe your heart'd stop. You'd die for a second. Then you wouldn't move so much.

**COWGIRL:** Psycho!

*(She holds her breath. He injects her. She exhales and relaxes.)*

That's why I love you, Cowboy. What'd you get me?

**COWBOY:** Lamb.

**COWGIRL:** Tastes like chicken.

**COWBOY:** It doesn't *taste* like anything.

**COWGIRL:** I can too taste it, and it tastes like chicken.

**COWBOY:** Everything tastes like chicken to you.

**COWGIRL:** I know what beef tastes like.

**COWBOY:** (*Beat.*) How long's this gonna hold you?

**COWGIRL:** Couple hours.

**COWBOY:** That's all?

**COWGIRL:** Were you standing there when he puréed this stuff? Feels like it's cut with chicken bouillon.

**COWBOY:** I can't watch the guy every second.

**COWGIRL:** Next time, bring the animal. I'll do it myself.

**COWBOY:** We can't lug the damn lamb around with us. It's not like we've got a car.

**COWGIRL:** So let it walk.

**COWBOY:** Before or after we kill it and slice it up?

**COWGIRL:** Take up less room if it's sliced.

**COWBOY:** And go bad.

**COWGIRL:** I feel like clucking.

*(Cowboy picks up his backpack.)*

**COWBOY:** A lamb will not fit in this pack.

**COWGIRL:** I know.

*(Cowboy pulls out a small insulated bag and holds up a vial from inside it.)*

**COWBOY:** What's in these vials, that's high test. And it stores easy.

**COWGIRL:** And it tastes like chicken. I don't feel so good.

*(He hugs her, trying to console her.)*

**COWBOY:** I know.

**COWGIRL:** I need a cow.

**COWBOY:** I know.

**COWGIRL:** I know I'm weak.

**COWBOY:** It's not your fault.

**COWGIRL:** I can't stop.

**COWBOY:** You gotta get your mind off it.

**COWGIRL:** I see a hamburger.

**COWBOY:** Where?

**COWGIRL:** *(Pointing in the air not far away:)* There.

**COWBOY:** Where?

**COWGIRL:** By the tree. In the bun. Can't you see it?

**COWBOY:** Is it very small?

**COWGIRL:** It's ten feet tall.

**COWBOY:** It's not there.

**COWGIRL:** I know, but it's dripping fat, and it's sizzling. It's on a sesame bun, and you can just see some onion sticking out. There's a dab of ketchup on the onion. Maybe it popped out from under the bun. It's winking at me.

**COWBOY:** The onion?

**COWGIRL:** The burger. The bun keeps opening and closing.

**COWBOY:** There's no burger.

**COWGIRL:** I know, but it looks so good.

**COWBOY:** Where is it?

**COWGIRL:** (*Pointing:*) There.

*(Cowboy walks toward the imaginary burger.)*

**COWBOY:** Am I there yet?

**COWGIRL:** It moved. It moved out of the way.

**COWBOY:** Where is it now?

**COWGIRL:** (*Pointing again to a different spot:*) There.

**COWBOY:** Tell me when I get there.

*(Cowboy moves toward the burger's new "location.")*

**COWGIRL:** It moved again.

**COWBOY:** Now where is it?

**COWGIRL:** I don't think you should chase it anymore. The bun looks angry.

**COWBOY:** It's in your head, baby.

**COWGIRL:** I know, but it's shaking from side to side. Don't make it mad.

**COWBOY:** You shoulda gone vegetarian.

**COWGIRL:** I love vegetables.

**COWBOY:** On your burger.

**COWGIRL:** (*To the imaginary burger:*) Please, just give me a little bite. A little taste. Drip fat on my tongue.

**COWBOY:** You know what saved me?

**COWGIRL:** (*To the burger:*) One little drop.

**COWBOY:** Fish. Used to raise 'em in a pond before I met you.



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**COWGIRL:** (*To the burger:*) I love you. I need you.

**COWBOY:** Salmon, sometimes in burger form, sometimes as a filet. Kept me off the beef. I could go for a good piece of salmon.

**COWGIRL:** (*To the burger:*) Where are you going?!

**COWBOY:** It's about family values when you think about it.

**COWGIRL:** (*To the burger:*) Don't leave me!

**COWBOY:** I had a nice tight nuclear family. My parents made sure we sat down together for dinner every Wednesday and Sunday. I set the table, my father said the grace, and my mom—I loved my mom—

**COWGIRL:** (*To the burger:*) Come back! Oh god!

**COWBOY:** My mom made us a balanced meal with a meat or fish dish, a vegetable, fruit, starch—and always some color on our plate.

**COWGIRL:** (*Beat.*) It didn't even drip anything on the ground for me to lick up.

**COWBOY:** It wasn't real.

**COWGIRL:** I'm gonna start shaking soon.

**COWBOY:** You just got an injection.

**COWGIRL:** The lamb didn't take.

**COWBOY:** You shoulda had a nuclear family. (*Beat.*) I might have something.

**COWGIRL:** Something what?

**COWBOY:** A scrap.

**COWGIRL:** A scrap of beef?

**COWBOY:** More like a pellet—if memory serves.

**COWGIRL:** Give it to me. I could run for days on a pellet.

**COWBOY:** Might even be a few pellets.

*(Cowgirl grabs the backpack and looks through it.)*

**COWGIRL:** Where is it?

**COWBOY:** Not in there.

**COWGIRL:** Stop torturing me.

**COWBOY:** I thought you liked being tortured. I'm saving it for a rainy day.

**COWGIRL:** It *is* a rainy day. *(Beat.)* One pellet now – I'll save the rest for later.

**COWBOY:** You can't eat just one. I know you.

**COWGIRL:** I could suck one. I could suck one for an entire day. *(Finishes looking through the backpack.)* Where is it?

*(Cowboy pulls a tiny piece of meat from his pants. He puts it in his mouth and tastes it.)*

**COWBOY:** Pork.

**COWGIRL:** Why'd you do that?

**COWBOY:** It was pork. No good.

**COWGIRL:** But you didn't know.

**COWBOY:** Smelled like pork once I checked it out. Examined it. Investigated it further.

**COWGIRL:** But you said it was beef.

**COWBOY:** I said if memory served.

**COWGIRL:** Yeah.

**COWBOY:** Memory didn't serve.

**COWGIRL:** How do I know it was pork?

**COWBOY:** Why would I eat your beef?

**COWGIRL:** Why not?

**COWBOY:** Do you want it?

**COWGIRL:** You ate it.

**COWBOY:** I put it in my mouth. I haven't swallowed it.

**COWGIRL:** Give it to me.

**COWBOY:** It's pork. It rolled across my tongue again.

*(He swallows it.)*

**COWGIRL:** What did you just do?

**COWBOY:** It was pork. No question.

*(Cowgirl grabs Cowboy's mouth and opens it.)*

All gone.

*(Cowgirl reaches into Cowboy's mouth with a finger.)*

What are you doing?

**COWGIRL:** Piece in your teeth.

*(She puts the finger with the fragment of the mystery meat into her mouth. She instantly spits it out.)*

Ugh! Why'd you say it was beef?

**COWBOY:** I said it was pork.

**COWGIRL:** Not at first.

**COWBOY:** I didn't know at first.

**COWGIRL:** You don't know who you're messing with. You don't know at all.

**COWBOY:** Do *you*?

*(Beat. Cowboy pulls a pair of carving knives from a locked case in his bag.)*

Cow's supposed to come through here any minute. Last one. Don't know what we're gonna do when it's gone.

**COWGIRL:** But you'll kill it for me. You'll kill it because you love me and I need it.

**COWBOY:** It's the last one.

**COWGIRL:** That didn't stop you with that bird. What was that bird?

**COWBOY:** Ostrich.

**COWGIRL:** We went to the zoo, and you climbed into the cage and chased it until you caught it. And then you roasted it piece by piece using your knife as a spit.

**COWBOY:** I shouldn't have done that.

**COWGIRL:** You ripped off little bite-size chunks with your bare hands and fed it to me—right there in the cage. It was so romantic.

**COWBOY:** I don't think I knew it was the last one.

**COWGIRL:** You hopped over the sign that said "last ostrich."

**COWBOY:** Doesn't mean I read it.

**COWGIRL:** You said, "Look, the sign says last ostrich."

**COWBOY:** I was young. I didn't know what I was doing.

**COWGIRL:** It was last month. I bet I could keep from shaking if I had a hit of ostrich.

**COWBOY:** Too late.

**COWGIRL:** It tasted just like beef. I think I'm gonna start soon.

**COWBOY:** Wanna try another shot of lamb?

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**COWGIRL:** My veins hurt.

**COWBOY:** No?

*(Cowgirl shakes her head.)*

**COWGIRL:** When's the cow coming?

**COWBOY:** Five o'clock if it's on time.

**COWGIRL:** What time is it now?

**COWBOY:** Four fifty-nine.

**COWGIRL:** Is it big?

**COWBOY:** I didn't ask.

**COWGIRL:** You didn't ask? Last cow and you didn't find out how much it weighs?

**COWBOY:** Last one. What's it matter? When it runs out, it runs out.

**COWGIRL:** What am I gonna do when it runs out?

**COWBOY:** Find something else.

**COWGIRL:** What?

**COWBOY:** I don't know. We'll think of something.

**COWGIRL:** I can't think of anything. I can't think. *(She starts to shake a little.)* I'm starting to shake again.

**COWBOY:** Don't ever take up salmon. Don't know what I'd do if I couldn't get a good piece of salmon in a pinch.

*(There's an offstage "moo.")*

**COWGIRL:** My burger!

**COWBOY:** I think you oughta go vegetarian, sprinkle some ground chuck on top. Taper off.

**COWGIRL:** Just kill the cow first.

**COWBOY:** It's the last one. Gotta think about these things. You spice it up with some jerk sauce, veggie burger's kinda tasty.

**COWGIRL:** If there's meat on it.

**COWBOY:** You gotta expand your horizons.

**COWGIRL:** You said I could have some meat to taper off. So get me some meat. Can't you see I'm shakin'?

*(The moo repeats.)*

**COWBOY:** Let me handle this.

*(He hides his carving knives in the back of his pants.)*

Hide.

**COWGIRL:** Where?

**COWBOY:** Pretend you're dead.

**COWGIRL:** But I can't stop shakin'.

*(Cowboy helps Cowgirl to the ground.)*

**COWBOY:** Involuntary muscle reflex. Happens all the time. Jerk around as much as you want. Just don't talk.

*(Enter SHEPHERD, younger than the others, holding a boombox – the source of the moo.)*

Excuse me – have you seen a cow?

*(Shepherd waves the boombox at Cowboy.)*

**SHEPHERD:** Sounds real, doesn't it.

**COWGIRL:** *(Shaking:)* Where's the cow?

**SHEPHERD:** What's wrong with *her*?

**COWBOY:** She's dead.

**SHEPHERD:** She just talked.

**COWBOY:** That wasn't talking. That was shaking.

**SHEPHERD:** I thought I heard "where's the cow?"

**COWBOY:** Teeth chattering probably. Tongue gets into the act, and you never know what might come out. It's all involuntary muscle reflexes. I once saw a dead man stand up, recite the Gettysburg Address backward and then choke the man standing next to him. They had to pry his ice cold hands off the man's throat. *(Beat.)* Dead people can do extraordinary things. Don't sell them short.

**SHEPHERD:** So how long will she shake?

**COWBOY:** Hard to say. Some of the dead can go on for a long time. What's the word on this cow?

**SHEPHERD:** You're looking for Betty?

**COWBOY:** Betty?

**SHEPHERD:** Betty the Bovine.

**COWBOY:** You named her.

**SHEPHERD:** We spend a lot of time together. But she's not here.

**COWBOY:** You and Betty –

**SHEPHERD:** We're just friends.

**COWBOY:** Where is she?

**SHEPHERD:** I can't say.

**COWBOY:** I'm not interested in killing her.

**SHEPHERD:** That'll make Betty's day.

*(Cowboy pulls the knives from his pants.)*

**COWBOY:** What do you think of these knives?

**SHEPHERD:** Do you want to kill *me*?

**COWBOY:** Just because a man pulls out two top-quality carving knives is no reason to think he's going to kill anyone.

**SHEPHERD:** You brought up killing Betty.

**COWBOY:** To say I was *not* interested in it.

**COWGIRL:** Kill the cow! You promised!

**COWBOY:** Logically, there's no reason to assume that because I'm not interested in killing the cow that I have to be interested in killing something in its place.

**SHEPHERD:** *Her.* Betty isn't an it.

**COWBOY:** In *her* place.

**COWGIRL:** I'm dying.

**SHEPHERD:** This is amazing how she keeps going.

**COWBOY:** I agree. So you come along with your music box, play some mooing sounds, see who comes out...?

**SHEPHERD:** I can't say.

**COWBOY:** Nod.

**SHEPHERD:** I can't nod.

**COWBOY:** Tell me about yourself.

**SHEPHERD:** What?

**COWBOY:** Tell me about yourself. I'm a stranger. Of course you're not going to nod at me. But if you knew more about me and I knew more about you, we wouldn't be strangers anymore. Tell me about yourself.

*(Cowboy sharpens the knives against each other.)*

By the by, I'm not threatening you.

**COWGIRL:** Torture him and find out where the cow is!



**COWBOY:** She was thinking very negative thoughts before she died. Go on.

**SHEPHERD:** Tell you about myself.

**COWBOY:** Yes.

**SHEPHERD:** What do you want to know?

**COWBOY:** Doesn't matter. Whatever you think would help us bond faster.

**SHEPHERD:** I could tell you how I met Betty.

**COWBOY:** How much does she weigh?

**SHEPHERD:** She's pregnant.

**COWGIRL AND COWBOY:** Pregnant!

**COWBOY:** *(To Shepherd:)* Excuse me. I need to talk to her... *(Indicating Cowgirl:)* spirit for a moment.

*(Cowboy crouches by Cowgirl.)*

We should wait 'til she delivers.

**COWGIRL:** What if he's lying?

**COWBOY:** Why would he?

**COWGIRL:** Because he knows we want to kill the cow, and he thinks we won't do it if it's pregnant.

**COWBOY:** It's the last cow.

**COWGIRL:** You said you loved me.

**COWBOY:** Baby, don't go tryin' to guilt me.

**COWGIRL:** I'm sick. I'm out of my head.

**COWBOY:** And if you were thinking like a rational human being, you would think "wait on the cow, let her deliver the calf, and then there'll be one for dinner and one to perpetuate the species."

**COWGIRL:** One cow can't perpet—

**COWBOY:** We artificially inseminate.

**COWGIRL:** And if it's a male?

**COWBOY:** Hope for the best.

**COWGIRL:** When's it due?

**COWBOY:** (*To Shepherd:*) How long?

**SHEPHERD:** What?

**COWBOY:** 'Til Betty pops.

**SHEPHERD:** Any day.

**COWGIRL:** Any *day*? I'll shake to shit [pieces] in a *day*.

**COWBOY:** Hang in there, baby.

**COWGIRL:** Kill them both. Kill them all. Now.

**COWBOY:** Take a nap.

**SHEPHERD:** Are you sure she's dead?

**COWBOY:** Very.

**SHEPHERD:** How can she take a nap then?

**COWBOY:** A nap?

**SHEPHERD:** Didn't you just say take a nap?

**COWBOY:** Tell me how you met Betty the Bovine. You said you would, but you never did.

**SHEPHERD:** I live on a farm. Betty's the last cow we have.

**COWBOY:** That's gripping. I never would have guessed that about you. More.

**SHEPHERD:** (*Beat.*) I went to the zoo once. I saw an ostrich.

**COWBOY:** Ugly bird.

**SHEPHERD:** I wouldn't know. It was dead. I got there just after some maniac climbed into the enclosure and hacked it up.

**COWBOY:** I feel I know you now. Thank you.

**SHEPHERD:** But you said to tell you about –

**COWBOY:** We're not getting married. We're just talking about a nod. A little nod about a cow.

*(Cowgirl screams.)*

Death's a bitch. [Death's hell.]

*(Cowgirl stands.)*

**COWGIRL:** Where's the cow?

**COWBOY:** Just like the Gettysburg Address.

**COWGIRL:** Give me a knife. I'll kill it myself.

**SHEPHERD:** *(Yelling off:)* Betty – run!

**COWBOY:** Everybody calm down. *(To off:)* Betty, there is no need to be alarmed. Everything is under control. *(To Shepherd and Cowgirl:)* Anyone who is not under control dies.

**COWGIRL:** You don't mean *me*.

**SHEPHERD:** I'd feel more under control with her on the ground.

**COWBOY:** Baby.

**COWGIRL:** What?

**COWBOY:** Get on the ground.

**COWGIRL:** Why should I get on the ground?

**COWBOY:** Because I asked you to.

**COWGIRL:** Don't listen to *him*. You don't love *him*.

**COWBOY:** We're not talking about him. We're talking about you. Get on the ground.

**COWGIRL:** Betty, sweetheart, you can come out now.

**SHEPHERD:** Stand your ground, Betty. *(To Cowboy:)* I would also feel more under control if you'd put the knives away.

*(Shepherd's left leg shakes subtly at first, then more obviously.)*

My left leg won't stop shaking.

**COWBOY:** What are you on?

**SHEPHERD:** Nothing. I get scared easily.

*(Cowboy puts away the knives.)*

**COWGIRL:** Betty, you don't know what you're missing. There's grass and...milk...and... *(Makes a mooing sound:)* Is that another cow I hear? Is that a male cow? Oh my, Betty, it's a boy cow.

**SHEPHERD:** *(To Cowboy:)* Make her lie down and be quiet.

**COWGIRL:** You don't want to do that, baby.

**COWBOY:** You're not thinking. I think you would think better on the ground.

**COWGIRL:** I've got the salmon.

**COWBOY:** What?

**COWGIRL:** The last salmon. I've got it. It's in a safe place, but if you don't get me this cow right now, the salmon gets it.

**COWBOY:** We're not down to the last salmon.

**COWGIRL:** It's safe now, but it won't be so safe in another 10 minutes.

**COWBOY:** I dabble. I don't eat entire species.

**COWGIRL:** A little here, a little there. Somebody spills oil in a lake, somebody else fishes, you dabble. Just because you weren't paying attention doesn't mean it didn't happen. (*Beat.*) Told you you didn't know who you were messing with, and you went ahead and pulled the pork stunt anyway.

**COWBOY:** You told me I didn't know who I was messing with *after* the pork.

**COWGIRL:** I meant to say it before.

**COWBOY:** I will not do to the cow what I did to the ostrich.

**SHEPHERD:** You killed the ostrich?

**COWGIRL:** You'd rather do it to the salmon.

**COWBOY:** Ugly bird. I'm not proud.

**SHEPHERD:** Children screamed that day.

**COWBOY:** They should have been in school.

**SHEPHERD:** I screamed. I still have nightmares.

**COWBOY:** Sorry about the mess. Bird didn't cooperate.

**SHEPHERD:** It's your fault my leg shakes. It started when I came home from the zoo.

**COWBOY:** People develop ticks.

**SHEPHERD:** I watched an animal die. You slit its throat.

**COWBOY:** You work on a farm for God's sake.

**SHEPHERD:** We don't kill our animals.

**COWBOY:** Exactly what kind of farm is it?

**SHEPHERD:** We grow crops. And we keep cows — a cow — for milk.

**COWGIRL:** If a salmon screams and there's no one to hear it, does it really scream?

*(Cowboy takes out his knives again.)*

Finally. Try to stab the cow without killing it so the meat'll stay fresh.

**COWBOY:** *(To Cowgirl:)* I'm going to kill you.

**COWGIRL:** Your salmon is in a tank with a teeny tiny hole, and don't think you'll find him without me. In nine minutes, his water'll run out. He'll gasp for air, maybe he'll scream for help, and then he'll do one last flop and go belly up. *(Beat.)* I thought you loved me.

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