

MEAT THE PARENTS

SYNOPSIS

BONNIE, a high school senior and carnivore trapped within a family of vegans, is dreading the return from college of her older, better-loved sister RACHEL and the new boyfriend GREG. To disrupt the first family dinner, BONNIE invites her new boyfriend WYATT, a football player and voracious meat-eater.

Bonnie has her suspicions about GREG, as he claims to be both vegan and from Texas. And ADAM, Rachel's ex-boyfriend and animal rights activist, has his suspicions as well. These suspicions are confirmed when we discover that GREG is snooping for information on NATHAN's animal rights organization.

When NATHAN takes GREG and RACHEL to a protest of Midwest Poultry & Sons, he ends up arrested, and DEBORAH finds herself not only bailing him out yet again but at the end of her emotional rope. Meanwhile, BONNIE, seeking attention in the most obnoxious of ways, has GREG worried that RACHEL might be pregnant.

When their home is terrorized by defenders of Midwest Poultry, the family unites. ADAM outs GREG as an insider working for his stepdad – the owner of Midwest Poultry – but GREG's growing appreciation for animals helps RACHEL forgive him. And BONNIE, the lone family rebel, discovers that WYATT is now embracing a tofu-based diet.

CAST LIST (4M, 3F)

Nathan Barnett	45. Founder of the Missouri Animal Rights Coalition and father of Rachel and Bonnie.
Deborah Halloran	44. Part-time corporate lawyer and full-time legal defender of her husband, Nathan. Mother of Rachel and Bonnie
Rachel Barnett	21. Senior at the University of Michigan. Bookish.
Bonnie Barnett	17. More attractive than Rachel. Dresses for attention. A carnivore living among vegans.
Greg Pruitt	22. Senior at the University of Michigan. Clean cut.
Adam Somerwood	22. Scruffy and intense. A devoted volunteer with the Missouri Animal Rights Coalition.
Wyatt Denton	17. Long. Muscled. Football player.

TIME: Early fall.

SETTING: Modest home in suburban St. Louis. The stage consists of a large living room with the front door on the left. At the rear of the living room, a small desk and computer function as a home office. To the right of the home office is an arched interior doorway. In front of the desk is a couch and TV. To the right of the living room is a dining room table, chairs and the entrance to the kitchen. The kitchen exits to a backyard with a hen house.

ACT I
SCENE I

(BONNIE enters through the interior doorway and into the kitchen and opens the fridge door. Sighs. Slams it shut. Rummages through various cupboards. Sighs more loudly. Turns to the audience.)

BONNIE

There's nothing to eat.

(Opens the fridge again as if to prove it. The fridge is full.)

Nothing to eat!

(Holds up a pack of cream cheese.)

Non-dairy cream cheese. Supposed to taste just like the real thing. Except that it tastes like chalk.

(Holds up turkey slices.)

Vegan turkey slices. Dad is addicted to this stuff. Looks just like turkey. Tastes just like cardboard.

(Holds up cheese.)

Happy Heart Cheese. Comes in all varieties. This one is supposed to taste like Brie. Perhaps after Brie has been left out in the sun for a week. This is my lot in life. Trapped in a meat-free, dairy-free, flavor-free totalitarian regime. And if that's not bad enough, they won't pay for cable.

(Points to the TV.)

You see that antenna? Try getting HBO on that thing. My parents. The wardens. They think they're saving me, along with all the little animals of the world. I applaud them for their noble goals, and I beg them to leave me out of it. But why, they ask? Don't I want to be a part of the solution instead of part of the problem? If the solution means eating so many beans my nickname at school now is Tootsie, I'll gladly be part of the problem. So then they tell me a vegan diet is healthier, that I'll have lower cholesterol, that I'll outlive all my friends. What friends? My nickname is Tootsie, remember? Right now, I'll just be happy if I live until graduation, when I'm finally free of this prison. But that's six months away. I'm not sure I'll survive until then. I need to do something now, something radical. Stage a carnivorous coup. A revolution. And not the bloodless kind. No, I prefer my revolutions medium rare.

(DEBORAH enters through the front door, dressed in work attire.)

DEBORAH

Don't eat too much. Your father's cooking tonight.

(BONNIE tosses the cheese back into the fridge.)

Why didn't you go with him to the airport?

BONNIE

So I could listen to him blather on and on about my perfect sister?

DEBORAH

He doesn't do that.

BONNIE

What household are you living in, Mom? Not a day goes by that he doesn't brag about her. Rachel made the dean's list. Rachel's applying for a Rhodes scholarship. Rachel's invented a cure for climate change.

DEBORAH

He brags about you plenty. You're just not always around to hear it.

BONNIE

Don't defend him. I know you're a lawyer and all, but facts are facts. Dad's vegan. Rachel's vegan. You're vegan. I'm the prodigal carnivore.

DEBORAH

And we accept you just the way you are.

BONNIE

Not in this house.

DEBORAH

Your father never said you can't eat meat, no matter how much that breaks his heart. He only insists that you can't live that way under our roof. And I support him. Now can we please table this argument for the remainder of the evening?

BONNIE

Yes, counselor.

DEBORAH

We're going to have fun tonight. Aren't you just a little bit curious to meet Rachel's boyfriend?

BONNIE

Boyfriend? Is that what we're calling him?

DEBORAH

Go easy on your sister. She never had boys chasing after her. You have no idea how that feels. I, for one, do.

BONNIE

Not you. You're kinda hot for an older woman.

DEBORAH

Be that as it may, I wasn't a hot *younger* woman.

BONNIE

Is that why you settled for Dad?

DEBORAH

I didn't settle for Dad. You think it's tough being vegan today, imagine what it was like in the 80s. Living on whole foods before there was a Whole Foods.

BONNIE

Is this joker vegan?

DEBORAH

That's what she says.

BONNIE

Remember Ravi?

DEBORAH

He was a very nice boy.

BONNIE

Yeah, sure. He was a Brahmin too, if I recall. Which was the real reason he didn't eat meat, not some animal activist obsession.

DEBORAH

She never called Ravi her boyfriend.

BONNIE

Certainly implied it. Is this guy from India too?

DEBORAH

He's from Texas.

BONNIE

Texas? There are vegans in Texas?

DEBORAH

It appears so. Now I'm going to get cleaned up for dinner. I suggest you do the same.

(DEBORAH exits through interior doorway.)

BONNIE

(To audience)

A Texas vegan? Well, this is Missouri, the Show-Me state. I'll believe it when I see it. Something tells me this evening might be interesting after all. I smell revolution in the air.

(BONNIE exits through interior doorway.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(NATHAN enters through the front door followed by RACHEL and GREG.)

NATHAN

Here we are.

(shouts)

Honey?

GREG

This is a beautiful home, Mr. Barnett.

NATHAN

Thank you, Greg. Would you two like a snack before dinner?

(NATHAN pops into kitchen and returns with a bowl.)

I can't imagine they fed you anything on that flight. Try this.

GREG

What is it?

RACHEL

My dad's killer cashews.

NATHAN

Go on. Have some.

(GREG grabs a morsel and tentatively eats it. Lights up. Grabs more.)

GREG

Wow. Not bad.

NATHAN

The secret ingredient is tamari sauce. Works on everything. If I'm feeling motivated enough, I'll get two pans going simultaneously – one with cashews and one with sunflower seeds – and I'll pour the sauce over both.

GREG

Kill two birds with one sauce.

(NATHAN winces but says nothing. Returns to the kitchen. GREG looks to RACHEL for guidance. BONNIE enters from the interior doorway but stands back, observing.)

GREG

What did I say?

RACHEL

It's no big deal. We try to avoid using phrases that portray animals negatively.

(GREG is still confused.)

RACHEL

Kill two birds?

GREG

Oh. That. It just slipped out.

BONNIE

The word police strike again.

RACHEL

Bon.

(BONNIE and RACHEL share an obligatory hug.)

RACHEL

Look how much you've grown since I was last home.

BONNIE

Imagine how tall I'd be if they fed me normal food. So this is the beau?

RACHEL
His name is Greg. Greg, Bonnie.

BONNIE
From Texas, eh?

GREG
That's right.

BONNIE
Where's the cowboy hat?

RACHEL
He checked it.

(DEBORAH enters.)

RACHEL
Mom!

DEBORAH
Welcome home, sweetie!
(They hug.)
And you must be Greg.

GREG
Nice to meet you, Mrs. Barnett.

RACHEL
It's Mrs. Halloran. She kept her name.

GREG
Oh, my mistake.

DEBORAH
I just like to keep people guessing. We've got a room all set up for you.

BONNIE
Don't get your hopes up. You're in *separate* rooms.

RACHEL
(Glares at BONNIE.)
I'll show you the way.

(RACHEL and GREG exit through interior doorway.)

(NATHAN enters from kitchen.)

NATHAN

Where'd everyone go?

BONNIE

They're hooking up in Rachel's room.

DEBORAH

Rachel is getting Greg settled into the *guest* room. So what did you think of him?

NATHAN

Nice boy. Athletic. Business major. She could do a lot worse.

BONNIE

She has done a lot worse.

NATHAN

You should talk, young lady.

BONNIE

Leave Rodney out of it. I dumped him already.

NATHAN

At least Greg bathes regularly.

BONNIE

Rodney lives off the grid, Dad. He's an anarchist, like me.

NATHAN

(To his wife.)

So what do you think of him?

DEBORAH

He certainly is cute.

BONNIE

I'd say he's using her, but I wouldn't know what for.

DEBORAH

What do his parents do?

NATHAN

Mom doesn't work. Dad owns a chain of oil-change franchises. Apparently all throughout the South. Wouldn't hurt to get free oil changes for life.

DEBORAH

Don't get ahead of yourself.

NATHAN

I forgot to tell you all the big news. We adopted a new girl today.

DEBORAH

We?

NATHAN

Well, I did.

BONNIE

They're not girls, Dad, they're chickens.

NATHAN

If you only spent a little time with them you'd think differently.

DEBORAH

I thought we didn't have any room for more.

NATHAN

It's a bit cramped.

BONNIE

Cramped? As in battery cage cramped?

NATHAN

Nothing of the sort. Don't get me started on battery cages, young lady.

DEBORAH

Yes, please don't go there.

NATHAN

Besides, I've been planning for weeks to expand the hen house.

DEBORAH

And how much will that cost?

NATHAN

Forget about the money. The girls are worth it. Come say hi.

(DEBORAH rolls her eyes before following NATHAN through the kitchen to the backyard.)

BONNIE

(to audience)

You catch that? Forget about the money? Did he say *Forget about the money* when I asked for a car? Of course not. I know my place in this family's ... pecking order.

(Knock at the front door.)

(BONNIE answers the door. It's ADAM.)

BONNIE

What are you doing here?

ADAM

Nice to see you, too, Bonnie. I'm here to see your dad.

BONNIE

Yeah, right. And what an amazing coincidence that my sister just happens to be home for the weekend.

ADAM

She is?

BONNIE

Seriously? You're going to act surprised? I thought you were some master of disguise.

(RACHEL enters from interior doorway.)

RACHEL

Adam.

ADAM

Hey, Rache. It's been a long time.

RACHEL

Yes, it has. How are you?

ADAM

Still tilting at windmills. Did your dad show you the latest videos?

RACHEL

Told me about them. I can't stomach watching them anymore.

ADAM
I know the feeling.

(DEBORAH enters.)

DEBORAH
Hello, Adam.

ADAM
Mrs. Halloran.

RACHEL
I hope you're staying safe.

ADAM
Don't worry about me. I always manage to stay a step ahead. I'd love to catch you up on everything, Rache. Maybe this evening we could go grab a drink or something.

RACHEL
Actually, I have a guest this weekend.

BONNIE
Her boyfriend.

DEBORAH
Bonnie, don't you have something to do?

BONNIE
No.

DEBORAH
Want me to give you something to do?

BONNIE
Exiled again.

(BONNIE exits to the kitchen, followed by DEBORAH.)

ADAM
Boyfriend?

RACHEL
It's not serious.

ADAM

Meeting the parents? Sounds serious to me.

RACHEL

I would have told you, but we haven't really been in touch.

ADAM

It's okay. I understand. He's a lucky guy.

RACHEL

I wouldn't go that far.

ADAM

I would.

(Pause)

I just have to see your dad for a sec.

RACHEL

He's out back with his flock.

(ADAM exits through the kitchen. DEBORAH enters, carrying a glass of wine.)

RACHEL

That was awkward.

DEBORAH

I'm not sure he's ever gotten over you.

RACHEL

I didn't know what to say. I haven't seen him in so long.

DEBORAH

I thought you emailed a lot.

RACHEL

We used to, my first year at college. But he kept sending me links to the videos he was making until I told him to stop. And not long after he stopped writing altogether. It's all animal rights, all the time with him, you know?

DEBORAH

I know the type.

RACHEL

When we used to go out, we would talk about a protest or undercover work or which movie star went back to eating meat. But do I have to live every day thinking about these issues? I just want to live in peace for a change — not feel all depressed or angry or both. I don't know how you've done it all these years.

DEBORAH

What?

RACHEL

Live with Dad.

DEBORAH

It's called Chardonnay.

(GREG enters through interior doorway.)

GREG

Can I help with anything?

DEBORAH

Nate has everything under control. All you two need to do is sit back and relax.

(ADAM enters. GREG stares at him curiously.)

ADAM

Rachel, if I don't see you again, have a great senior year.

RACHEL

Oh, Adam, this is Greg. Greg Pruitt.

GREG

(Shaking hands.)

Have we met before?

ADAM

I don't think so.

(ADAM walks to the door, followed by BONNIE.)

Bye, all.

GREG

Does he go to Michigan?

RACHEL

No. He went to school in St. Louis. Graduated last year.

BONNIE

He's the ex-boyfriend. They were hot and heavy once.

RACHEL

Thank you, Bonnie.

(To GREG)

He was just here to see my dad. Business stuff.

GREG

So he works for your dad?

RACHEL

He works *with* my dad. Why? Is that a problem?

GREG

No. Not at all.

ACT I

SCENE 3

(Later that evening. Everyone is taking their seats at the dining room table, except for BONNIE.)

NATHAN

Where is she?

DEBORAH

Bonnie! Dinner!

(BONNIE enters through interior doorway and slumps her shoulders when she realizes she has to sit next to her father. BONNIE taps on RACHEL's shoulder.)

BONNIE

Can I switch seats with you?

RACHEL
No. What's wrong with that seat?

(BONNIE sits.)

NATHAN
You see, that's not so bad, sitting next to your old man.

(BONNIE mumbles.)

NATHAN
What?

BONNIE
I said, yes.

NATHAN
What's that on your breath?

BONNIE
Nothing.

NATHAN
That's not nothing.

BONNIE
Spearmint?

NATHAN
No.

BONNIE
Lavender?

NATHAN
I know exactly what that is.

BONNIE
It's not what you think.

NATHAN
It certainly is, young lady.

BONNIE
How would you even know? When's the last time you actually had some?

NATHAN
Senior year in high school.

GREG
(to RACHEL)
Are they talking about pot?

RACHEL
Not exactly.

BONNIE
A girl's gotta live, dammit.
(She holds up a Slim Jim.)
I have a weakness for cured meats.
(Looks flirtingly at Greg. RACHEL glares back.)

NATHAN
Not under my roof.

BONNIE
But I bought it with my own money.

NATHAN
That's not the point.

BONNIE
I didn't sign up for this life of privation, Dad. I need my protein.

NATHAN
There's more protein in the kale salad than that entire stick of meat byproduct.

BONNIE
It's called a Slim Jim.

NATHAN
Are you going to take it out of here or am I?

BONNIE
Fine. And please note that Greg here witnessed everything. I'll be calling him to the stand when I file my brief.

(BONNIE runs back through interior doorway.)

DEBORAH
I have to stop talking shop in front of her. She picks up things.