

= A Milhouse Divided =

" A Milhouse Divided " is the sixth episode of The Simpsons eighth season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on December 1 , 1996 . In the episode , Milhouse 's parents Kirk and Luann get a divorce , causing Homer to examine his own marriage . It was directed by Steven Dean Moore and is the only episode for which Steve Tompkins has sole writing credit .

= = Plot = =

Marge throws a dinner party to escape from the doldrums at the Simpson house , so she decides to invite the Flanders , the Lovejoys , the Hibberts and the Van Houtens . All the guests are enjoying dinner except for the Van Houtens who argue with each other as Milhouse plays in another room with Bart and the children . Kirk and Luann get more quarrelsome as the party progresses and finally , despite Marge trying to divert the party away from the pair , the two get into a fight and Luann demands a divorce .

Kirk moves out of the Van Houten house and , despite his drab new surroundings , manages to keep a cheery attitude toward it all until he is fired from his job at the cracker factory as " crackers are a family food ... happy families " and Kirk , being single , is apparently unfit for the position . Meanwhile , Luann quickly readjusts to single life with Milhouse and starts a new relationship with an American Gladiator . Kirk also tries to have a new relationship with a sleazy radio station worker , but ends up getting his car stolen and his demo tape wrecked . While at Moe 's , Kirk mentions that he never saw the divorce coming and regrets not being more sensitive to Luann 's needs , concluding that " one minute , your wife is cooking you your favorite meal ; the next , you 're thawing hot dogs in a gas station sink . " Homer cheers Kirk up by telling him that his marriage to Marge is solid , but Homer begins to fear that his marriage may end in divorce after coming home and finding hot dogs thawing in the sink .

Homer enlists the aid of Lisa to help him figure out how to save his marriage , but Lisa tells Homer that he is lucky to have Marge . He recalls his wedding reception , which was nothing more than Homer and Marge eating a whale cake at a roadside truck stop . Homer tries to perform selfless gestures for Marge , such as making soothing ocean noises to lull her to sleep and cutting her hair , but they only serve to annoy her .

Deciding at that point that Marge deserves a fresh start , Homer secretly files for a divorce . As Marge returns home later that night , Homer surprises her by hiding all their friends in the living room and declares that he wants to be remarried , this time with a perfect wedding . The two are remarried (though in Season 20 it is revealed that the marriage in this episode was invalid as Reverend Lovejoy was uncertified at this time due to a clerical error , meaning Homer and Marge were still divorced) . Meanwhile , Kirk decides to try to get back together with Luann by singing " Can I Borrow a Feeling " , the song he recorded on a demo tape . However , the attempt fails ; Luann refuses to take Kirk back and Kirk is sent out of the Simpsons house .

= = Production = =

" A Milhouse Divided " is the only episode for which Steve Tompkins has sole writing credit , although he had been a part of the writing staff for several years . The writers wanted to do an episode that involved a couple getting divorced . They had wanted to break the sitcom convention that characters who look like they will divorce get back together and have two characters remain divorced even after the episode . The Van Houtens were chosen because the writers felt that they were the most developed couple next to Marge and Homer and the Lovejoys . The scene in the episode " Sideshow Bob 's Last Gleaming " where Milhouse is in a jet pretending to fire missiles at his parents is where they got the idea to have his parents ' marriage be in trouble .

Originally , the episode also focused on the divorce 's effects on Milhouse and there was a subplot that involved Bart being jealous of Milhouse and wishing that Marge and Homer would also separate . Several scenes were written and animated for the episode , but ultimately they were cut because

the script was very long . The third act of the episode shifts the focus from the Van Houtens to Homer and Marge because the writers felt that tertiary characters could not carry an audience 's interest for an entire episode . Bill Oakley has said that he felt that the episode would have failed had they stuck with the Van Houtens for the third act and most of the other writers also felt that it was the right move .

The idea for the dinner party came from Bill Oakley , who had wanted to have a party similar to the one in " The War of the Simpsons " . For the second half of the episode , Luann was redesigned to look more youthful and was given a new outfit . A big name singer was originally sought to sing " Can I Borrow a Feeling ? " over the end credits . The writers wanted Sheryl Crow , but she declined and the concept was later dropped .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " A Milhouse Divided " finished tied for 50th in the weekly ratings for the week of November 25 ? December 1 , 1996 with a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 3 and was viewed in 8 million homes . It was the fourth @-@ highest @-@ rated show from the Fox Network that week .

Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , called it " More drama than comedy , and very honest in its dealings with the Van Houtens ' divorce and its effects on Milhouse . "