

A HILLBILLY WEDDIN'

by Le Roma Greth



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SYNOPSIS: Pa Belsnickle is a man with six problems—in the form of six unmarried daughters. Juney Lou, his third daughter, wants to marry Homer Upchlager, but Ma Belsnickle has decided Juney Lou can't get married until Ceelie, a ripe old nineteen, and Bonnie Mae, the bookworm, are married and living happily ever after. She elects Pa to find husbands for them. Pa takes his shotgun off the wall with a very simple method of procuring the necessary husbands. He decides to “wing” ‘em, pick out the buckshot, and have the boys married to his girls before they know what happened. In the midst of Pa's husband hunting, Ronald Maxwell, a medical student, and his aunt arrive at the Belsnickle's mountain cabin. They are vacationing in the area and their car broke down. Both Ceelie and Bonnie Mae are instantly attracted to the handsome stranger. Bonnie Mae keeps her adoration secret, however, Ceelie utterly refuses to marry anyone else. That presents a major problem since Ceelie is the dirtiest, homeliest hillbilly girl in the valley. Pa gets his trusted gun, but unfortunately misses Ronald. Two neighbors (male and unmarried) decide that the handsome stranger loose among the valley's most attractive girls is a threat to their manhood. They decide to fake a feud to scare him away. Ma forbids Pa to take another shot at Ronald so he, ignorant of the other plan, also decides to fake a feud and shoot a husband for Ceelie. The feudin' finally settles long enough for Ceelie and Bonnie Mae to find happiness and Ronald to escape with fond vacation memories. One interior set.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 females, 6 males, extras)

PA BELSNICKLE (m) Pa is a typical lazy hillbilly. When he has to move, he moves slowly. He speaks slowly, too, with a whine in his voice. He has a long black beard and, if possible, long black hair over which he wears a grungy hat. His trousers are

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baggy and tattered and remain a part of his attire by the support of a single suspender. His shirt is very faded and hangs open at the top. The sleeves are unevenly cut off at the elbows. He is shoeless. (138 lines)

MA BELSNICKLE (f)..... Mother, can alternately whine or demand. She works hard, but weary futility shows her movements. Her hair is wispy, streaked with gray and knotted plainly on her neck. She wears a faded housedress and a gingham apron. She also wears run-over shoes. (49 lines)

CEELIE BELSNICKLE (f)..... Nineteen year old daughter. She is most unattractive. She is not only homely, but very dirty. Her face, arms, and legs are streaked with dirt. Her hair straggles across her face in wild disorder because it has never been combed. Her dress is equally filthy. She doesn't wear any shoes. She changes into an old silk dress eventually. (117 lines)

BONNIE MAE BELSNICKLE (f) Eighteen year old daughter. She is very pretty, petite, and combed. She is well-read and secretly unhappy about the state of her people. Her cotton dress is neat and tied with a belt. She wears no shoes. (91 lines)

- JUNEY LOU BELSNICKLE (f) Sixteen year old daughter. She also has personal beauty. She is more light-hearted than Bonnie Mae. Her hair is frilled and curly and tied with a bright ribbon. Her dress is colorful and frilly despite its obvious cheapness. A bunch of flowers are tied around her belt. She, too, is barefoot. (33 lines)
- FOUR BELSNICKLE (f)..... Fourteen year old daughter. She is a capable girl, rather chubby. She wears pigtailed pinned on top her head and a cotton dress. She is reasonably clean, but barefoot. (15 lines)
- FIVE BELSNICKLE (f) Thirteen year old daughter. She is more slender than Four and moves quickly. She wears braids tied with ribbons. She is quite dirty and her dress is anything but clean. (16 lines)
- SIX BELSNICKLE (f)..... Twelve year old daughter. She would be a brat if she had the energy. She is quite small, dirty, pigtailed, with a short, beltless dress. (16 lines)
- OBEEY UPSCHLAGER (m) Eighteen year old neighbor. He is a tall, rangy youth with a broad grin. He wears a shirt and tattered trousers. He is quite likeable. (61 lines)
- CHIZ UPSCHLAGER (m) Obeye's brother, about seventeen. His attire is a duplicate of his brother's. He appears somewhat slow-witted. (69 lines)

- RONALD MAXWELL (m)..... A medical student, about twenty-five. He is a handsome young man neatly attired. He is deeply moved by the troubles of the human race and is genuinely sympathetic, despite his personal wealth. (77 lines)
- LUCY MAXWELL (f) Ronald's regal, haughty aunt. Her hair looks as if she just stepped out from a dryer in a beauty parlor and is sprinkled with gray. Despite her advancing years, she is very attractive. She wears a suit with a blouse. A fur jacket/shawl could be thrown over her shoulders. Her hat is a pert fluff of feathers. She carries gloves and a matching handbag. Her jewelry is large but in good taste. She is, in short, the personification of material wealth and power. There is no room in her elevated world for poverty. (49 lines)
- REVEREND (m) The valley's only minister. Accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of the people who live in the valley. Educated and well-spoken, he wears a dark suit, dark tie, and white shirt with shoes. (12 lines)
- COUSIN ZEKE (m)..... A relative of the Belsnickle family, he wears a greasy shirt and jeans, no shoes. (29 lines)

EXTRAS:

THE COUSINS (m/f)..... Any number, attired in various hillbilly costumes. The band can either play music on real instruments or make sounds resembling music on toy “sweet potatoes” or kazoos. Few speaking lines. (*Non-Speaking.*)

NOTE: All characters and situations herein depicted are purely imaginary. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is a coincidence.

SET

The “living room” of the Belsnickle cabin is a cheerless place. Up left is a door opening into a debris-cluttered yard. A window in the wall left looks out on unpainted sheds and a pig pen. A door in the right wall leads into the only other room, the kitchen. Up center, right, is a stone fireplace. A few unlit logs wait forlornly for winter. An attempt at embellishment has been made by placing an array of broken glasses and vases on the mantel. Directly above the fireplace hangs a gun. A large, round table stands at right center flanked by two uncomfortable wooden chairs. The table is covered with a bright, checkered cloth upon which a large patch is visible. On top of the table stands an old kerosene lamp. Before the curtainless window at left, is a long, wooden bench. Up right and up left stand two battered, backless chairs. The one up right holds the box of rattlesnakes. If desired, a mounted bear or deer head may be hung on the wall up right. There are no rugs.

STAGE PROPERTIES

- ☐ Two wooden chairs
- ☐ Large round table
- ☐ Lamp on table
- ☐ Two wooden chairs at table
- ☐ Long wooden bench
- ☐ Fireplace
- ☐ Gun, on wall above fireplace
- ☐ Shade on window

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HAND PROPERTIES

ACT ONE

- ☐ Checkerboard (Pa)
- ☐ Burlap bags; Cardboard box with holes (Ceelie)
- ☐ Quilt and blanket (Belsnickles)
- ☐ Battered bucket; Lipstick (Juney Lou)
- ☐ [2] Chipped cups and [8] spoons (Four)
- ☐ Large bowl with soup (Five)
- ☐ Loaf of unsliced bread (Six)
- ☐ Book (Bonnie Mae)
- ☐ Cracker basin and rags (Five)

ACT TWO

- ☐ Ceelie's dirty dress; Pocket knife; Hat with hole (Pa)
- ☐ Handkerchief (Juney Lou)
- ☐ Arithmetic book (Bonnie Mae)
- ☐ Musical instrument (Zeke)

ACT THREE

- ☐ Tube of lipstick; Hair ribbon (Juney Lou)
- ☐ Flowers; Rusty tin cans (Five)
- ☐ Thick club; Dirty dress; Small bouquet of flowers; Curtain for veil (Ceelie)
- ☐ Small black book; Small slip of paper (Reverend)

NOTE: If district policies and/or regulations prohibit the use of a gun on stage, we suggest Pa use a flyswatter or broom instead of a gun for coercion.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *Early morning in the Belsnickle cabin.*

AT RISE: *Pa and Obeey are seated at the round table right with a checkerboard between them. Each sits with chin cupped in hand staring hard at the board. On the long bench, left, Ceelie is stretched out, snoring loudly. She is covered with tattered burlap bags and is using one for a pillow. Center stage, left, a quilt has been spread on the floor. Upon it are sleeping Bonnie Mae, Juney Lou, Four, Five, and Six. They have a blanket for covering. A rooster crows off stage left.*

OBEEY: *(Slowly.)* Ain't it soon time ya moved, Pa Belsnickle?

PA: *(Even slower.)* Ain't made up my mind which way t' move yet.

The rooster crows again. Obeey, seated at the right of the table, looks toward the window, blinks his eyes.

OBEEY: Pa Belsnickle—

PA: Huh?

OBEEY: Hit be morning!

PA: Cain't be.

OBEEY: Thar's light a-comin' in the window. Wouldn't be no light a-comin' in the window if tweren't morning! Ya kin see fer yerself.

PA: I ain't turned that a-way.

Enter Ma Belsnickle through the door right. She pauses, hands on hips, glaring at them.

MA: *(Whines.)* Ain't ya moved yet, Pa?

PA: Takes time. Ya cain't hurry a game of checkers.

MA: *(Advancing.)* Thet's whut ya said last night! Obeey's Ma'll think he fell inter the river! *(She seizes the board and checkers all in one sweep.)* Now then! Obeey Upschlager, you git t' hum! Ain't no checker game should last more'en three days!

PA: Aw, Ma . . . jest when I'd about decided, too!

MA: Get home, Obeey!

PA: Ya might offer him some vittles afore he goes! Hit be a far walk t' his cabin.

MA: Hit be only three miles as the crow flies! They're our nearest neighbors. Git, Obeey!

OBEERY: (*Reluctantly rising.*) Reckon Ma'll be startin' t' miss me about now. Onct a week she takes roll-call t' make sure she ain't lost none of the kids.

PA: How many'd she have at last count?

OBEERY: Eighteen. I don't know whar the extra one come frum. We usually only count seventeen.

MA: Heerd Mrs. Offenduff over the valley wuz missin' one.

OBEERY: Maybe thet's whar hit come frum. We'll send hit over effen we kin find hit agin.

MA: Come agin, Obeey. Only don't stay so long the next time.

OBEERY: S' long.

Exit Obeey through the door up left. Ma moves to center stage, bends down, shouts, "HEY!" at the top of her voice. There is an immediate reaction beneath the blanket. Pa slumps down in his chair, chin on chest, and immediately starts snoring.

SIX: (*Jumping to her feet.*) Whut hit me?

MA: Ya lazy young 'uns! Hit be five-thirty already! Ya overslept!

FIVE: (*Rising and beginning to vigorously scratch herself.*) I ain't sleepin' on the end tonight? They wuz shovin' me off the covers all night, Ma!

MA: Ya shoulda shoved back. Why air ya scratchin', Five? Are ya sure ya tuck thet bath last spring like I told ya?

FIVE: Shore, I tuck a bath. Ceelie's the only one whut wouldn't.

Four, Bonnie Mae, and Juney Lou are on their feet, yawning and stretching. Ma goes to the bench, left, and shoves Ceelie onto the floor.

MA: (*Suspiciously.*) Five, ya shore ya ain't got too close t' Ceelie lately?

FIVE: Naw. Besides, I don't think she got bugs no more.

CEELIE: (*Picking herself off the floor.*) Wuz anybody talkin' t' me?

MA: *(Hands Five the checkerboard and claps her hands.)*

Time fer breakfast! I milked the goat already. Four, take the lamp offen the table! Five, bring in the soup! Six, bring in the bread! Juney Lou, git the bucket of milk offen the porch! Ceelie, git rid of the burlap bags! Bonnie Mae git rid of the covers.

They rush to do the tasks indicated. Ceelie and Bonnie Mae grab the various blankets and rush them off stage right. Juney Lou exits up left and reenters a moment later with an old bucket containing milk, which she places directly on the table right. Four takes the lamp from the table and takes it off stage right, returning with two chipped cups and eight spoons. Five takes the checkerboard off stage right and brings back a large bowl and places it on the table; Six brings the bread from off stage right and places it beside the bowl.

MA: *(When they have all assembled in sprinting positions at center stage.)* Git ready! Git set! GO!

There is a mad rush for the table, Ma joining in. They bump against Pa and he awakens and starts eating. They all eat from the large bowl, gulping as fast as possible. They rip the unsliced bread apart, fight over it, and jam their mouths full. They dip into the bucket of milk with their two cups and pass them around. They shove each other and fight for places at the table, all eating, shouting, and talking at once. In a short time, the confusion ceases abruptly. Ceelie, with a large slab of bread, dashes up left and takes the cardboard box from the chair. She sits down and begins to feed whatever is inside the box, holding it on her lap. Pa falls asleep again.

FIVE: Boy, thet wuz good!

MA: *(Well satisfied with herself.)* Yep. Nothin' like a nice quiet meal t' start the day off right!

JUNEY LOU: *(Moving to stage left, applying lipstick to her mouth without the aid of a mirror.)* All you people think about is yer stomachs!

FOUR: You think yer pretty since thet traveling salesman give ya a sample of thet new-fangled lip rouge, don't ya? I noticed you wuz eatin' like ennybody else, Juney Lou!

JUNEY LOU: (*Haughtily returning the lipstick to her pocket.*) Much you know how I feel, Four Belsnickle! I got a feller!

FOUR: (*Scornfully.*) Since when?

MA: Hit be true. Juney Lou's sweet on Homer Upschlager.

BONNIE: Obeey's brother?

JUNEY LOU: Yep. Me an' him is courtin'!

SIX: Aw – that's silly stuff! (*She goes up left to Ceelie.*) How's yer rattlesnakes this mornin', Ceelie?

CEELIE: (*Scratching herself.*) They're swell! Onrey critters though! Look at that one. (*Pointing into the box.*) He's mad 'cause the other one got most of the crumbs.

BONNIE: Juney Lou, do ya think Homer'll ask ya t' marry up with him?

JUNEY LOU: Shore.

BONNIE: Air ya?

MA: Git! All of ya! Clean off the table! Ceelie, put them ugly critters away an' go out an' feed the hogs! Six, you help her. But mind ya don't git too close to her! I don't want you scratchin'! The rest of you git to the kitchen! An' mind, ya be careful with the soup! Thar's enough left fer dinner! Jest scrape the leavin's off the dishes. They ain't dirty enough t' wash yet. Maybe we'll wash 'em tomorrow.

The girls scurry. Ceelie and Six exit through the door up left after Ceelie returns the lid to the box of rattlesnakes and replaces them on the chair. The others remove the remains of the breakfast and exit through the door right. Ma watches them. After they have closed the door she goes to it and listens. Apparently satisfied she returns to Pa's chair.

MA: Pa! Pa!

PA: (*With eyes closed.*) Huh?

MA: Pa, open yer eyes! I wanna talk t' ya!

PA: (*Opening his eyes.*) Has lightnin' struck the cabin agin, Ma?

MA: (*Turning away, very worried.*) Ain't notin' like thet. Hit be Juney Lou. She aims t' marry up with Homer Upschlager!

PA: Does he aim't marry up with **her**?

MA: Reckon.

PA: (*Closing his eyes again.*) Then hit be all settled. She's sixteen. Plenty old enough t' git hitched.

MA: (*Turning to him, she bends down and violently shakes him.*) PA! Thar's more to hit then thet! She's sixteen, shore. Bonnie Mae an' Ceelie be older! Ceelie's **nineteen** an' she ain't hitched yet!

PA: (*Opening his eyes and sitting up.*) Reckon I didn't know she wuz thet old yit. Why, she's an old maid!

MA: An' effen she don't git hitched soon, ain't nobody gonna want her. We'd have her around fer the rest of our born days then!

PA: (*Shaking his head.*) Thet'd be awful! She's to dirty t' have around the house. She's - unsanitary!

MA: An' effen Juney Lou gits hitched afore Ceelie an' Bonnie Mae they won't git nobody! The oldest has got to be married first. Ya gotta git husbands fer Ceelie an' Bonnie Mae, Pa!

PA: Ma, ya cain't mean hit! Hit'd take years t' find somebody who'd wanna marry up with Ceelie!

MA: Ya gotta do hit an' hit cain't takes years!

PA: (*Groaning.*) I'm tard!

MA: Don't ya see, Pa? We still got Four, Five, an' Six t' think about. They'll be gittin't the marrying age soon! The older ones has got to be out of the way.

PA: Say, Ma, how come we named 'em Four, Five an' Six anyhow? I forgit.

MA: The schoolmarm wuz a-boardin' hyar then. She wuz tryin' t' teach ya t' count. Ya only evir got as far as six. Effen Ceelie, Bonnie Mae, an' Juney Lou'd been borned after ya larned the numbers, I reckon they'd a been One, Two an' Three.

PA: I recollect now.

MA: Pa, I'm sendin' Ceelie in. Ya git a husband fer her, understand?

PA: Cain't we wait till tomorrow?

MA: Now!

Exit Ma through the door up left; Pa rises and stretches his stiff legs. Ceelie enters.

CEELIE: Ya wanted me, Pa?

PA: Nope! I mean – yep. Yer Ma figures ya oughta be gittin' hitched.

CEELIE: Whut fer?

PA: Wal, all gals is supposed t' git hitched once in their lives. Now – who'd ya like?

CEELIE: I ain't thunk about hit.

PA: (*Going to fireplace and getting his gun. He returns to center stage with it.*) Start thunkin'. I'll jest wing him nice and easy. After we git all the buckshot picked out, we'll have the weddin'.

CEELIE: I don't want no man with buckshot in him, Pa!

PA: Aw, he'll be as good as new in no time! Who'd ya want?

CEELIE: Thar's only five fellers what ain't married in these hills. I don't like one more'n another.

PA: Then it don't matter. We'll wing the first one we come to!

He starts toward the door up left as Chiz Upschlager enters.

CHIZ: Howdy! Is my brother Obeey hyar?

PA: (*Raising gun.*) I hate t' git blood all over Ma's floor, but this'll save us walkin' after one.

CHIZ: Hold on thar a minute!

CEELIE: (*Inspecting the merchandise.*) Ain't he kinda skinny, Pa?

CHIZ: (*With panic.*) Ya lookin' fer a husband fer Ceelie?

PA: Yep.

CHIZ: H-Homer's mech fatt'r'n me! A-An' Obeey's purtier! I'm skinny. (*Holds out a well-rounded arm.*) See! Notin' but skin an' bones! I'm a lazy polecat too! I niver work! My teeth are bad; I got fallen arches! I—Aye! Aye! Aye!

Pa is backing him against the wall left.

CHIZ: (*Weakly.*) Ceelie'd like Homer an' Obeey mech better!

CEELIE: Obeey's sweet on Bonnie Mae an' Juney Lou an' Homer are courtin'.

PA: Thet leaves Chiz.

CEELIE: Whut's the matter, Chiz? Don't ya wanna marry up with me?

CHIZ: (*Still against the wall.*) W-Who me?

PA: Ain't she good enough fer ya?

CHIZ: I – I didn't say thet! She's swell! Only—

PA: Only whut?

CHIZ: Only I'd rather be daid then married t' her!

PA: (*Moving the gun higher.*) Okay, effen thet's the way ya want hit.

CHIZ: Oh, no! I'm too young t' die! I wuz only foolin'!

CEELIE: Ya wuz? Ya will marry up with me? Jest think – the six of us! One big, happy family!

CHIZ: S-Six?

CEELIE: Me an' you, my pet hog, an' the three rattlesnakes!

Chiz groans loudly.

PA: Enough o' this talkin'. (*He backs away a little.*) Git back, Ceelie. Hit be time t' show him ya ain't a bad catch.

CEELIE: Don't spoil his looks, Pa. He's purty!

PA aims the gun; Chiz groans loudly, covers his face with his hands and cowers against the wall. Bonnie Mae, carrying a book, enters through door right.

BONNIE: Pa! Whut air ya aimin' t' do?

PA: (*Starting and lowering the gun.*) Gol dang hit, Bonnie Mae! Ya spoiled my aim!

CEELIE: (*Proudly.*) Me an' Chiz is gittin' hitched, Bonnie Mae.

BONNIE: Chiz doesn't look too happy about hit.

CHIZ: (*Half weeping.*) All I comed fer wuz t' find Obeey! Maw took count this mornin' an' he turned up missing!

PA: Obeey'll be home by now. We wuz playin' checkers. Now . . . (*He raises gun again.*)

BONNIE: (*Advancing firmly.*) Pa! Put thet gun away! Ya cain't do things like thet no more!

PA: Who sez?

BONNIE: (*Holding up her book.*) These books I read say so, Pa! Ya jest cain't do them things no more!

PA: I always knowed them books wuz no good! Ain't no book tellin' me whut I kin do!

BONNIE: (*Appealingly.*) Ceelie, ya don't want no husband what has to t' be shot t' be made to marry up with ya, do ya?

CEELIE: I won't niver git no other kind.

While they are talking, Pa has turned to Bonnie Mae at center stage. Chiz uncovers his face, sees his opportunity and hurriedly slips out the door up left.

BONNIE: Shore, ya will! Thar must be some boy somewhar who'll think yer purty an' wanna marry up with ya.

CEELIE: He ain't showed up yit!

BONNIE: Ya don't really want Chiz Upschlager, do ya, Ceelie?

CEELIE: Wal – he don't rightly appeal t' me.

BONNIE: Thar! Ya see? Ya gotta marry up with somebody who appeals t' ya!

PA: But we got him an' we ain't got another one. *(He turns.)* Chiz – whar in tarnation did he go?

BONNIE: He probably got out while he could.

PA: Confound hit, Bonnie Mae! Ya left him git away! No tellin' when we'll catch another one!

BONNIE: Oh, Pa –

PA: *(Going up right and replacing gun above fireplace.)* Ya read too mech, Bonnie Mae. Yer always in one of them books the schoolmarm gives ya.

BONNIE: Books is wonderful things.

PA: Yer Ma sez you an' Ceelie is t' git hitched an' I'm aimin' t' see thet ya do!

BONNIE: *(Dismayed.)* Me an' Ceelie—!

PA: *(Returning to center stage.)* Yep. Who do ya want, Bonnie Mae? Yer cleaner an' purtier then Ceelie. Seems like we won't have mech trouble with ya.

BONNIE: *(Almost weeping.)* I don't wanna git hitched, Pa! I don't love nobody around hyar!

PA: Obeey's sweet on ya.

BONNIE: But I ain't sweet on him! I jest wanna read, Pa!

PA: Yer Ma sez ya gotta git hitched an' I aim t' see thet ya do!

BONNIE: No, Pa! Please—!

Knock on door up left.

PA: Who in tarnation'd come knockin'? Ain't nobody knocks in these parts.

CEELIE: If hit be strangers, they better not come in an' sit on my rattlesnakes. I wouldn't want 'em hurt.

BONNIE: The strangers?

CEELIE: No! The rattlesnakes!

BONNIE: (*Throwing her sister a resentful glance, goes to door up left and opens it.*) Howdy.

RONALD: (*Off stage.*) Hello! Do you by any chance have a telephone?

BONNIE: Huh?

RONALD: A telephone. You know. It's a – Oh, it's no use, Aunt Lucy! These people probably never heard of telephones!

BONNIE: (*Indignantly.*) Shore, I heerd tell of 'em! Never seed one though.

PA: Effen thar' a-comin' in, let 'em in, Bonnie Mae. Effen they ain't shet the door!

Bonnie Mae stands aside; Ronald Maxwell and his aunt enter. The latter draws her fur piece closer about her shoulders and glances haughtily around the cabin.

PA: Ya be strangers hyarabouts.

RONALD: Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Ronald Maxwell and this is my aunt, Lucy Maxwell. We were touring through your delightful hills when our car broke down. We had started out very early this morning; we wanted to cover ground. Our car is stalled about two miles up that dirt road –

MRS. MAXWELL: That horrid road! If only we had kept on the main highways!

RONALD: (*A bit cool.*) It was your idea, Aunt Lucy.

PA: Yer in a fix, mister. I'm Pa Belsnickle an' these is my two oldest young 'uns – Bonnie Mae an' Ceelie. The dirty one's Ceelie.

Ever since Ronald's entrance, Ceelie has been ogling him in obvious fascination. Both girls acknowledge the introduction with awkward curtsies. Ronald nods.

RONALD: Is there any place we can go to use a telephone?

PA: They got a telephone down at Horsehair Junction.

RONALD: Wonderful! Where's that?

PA: Thirty miles as the crow flies.

RONALD: I'm not a crow. How do you get there?

PA: Don't. Niver been thet fur in my life.

RONALD: But –

PA: Old Jod Kesselftyer does though. Goes down regular once a month fer supplies. Sells 'em t' the rest of us.

RONALD: A month . . .

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, Ronald! What are we going to do?

BONNIE: Pa, I heerd he's going tomorrow. *(To Ronald.)* He's got a big cart. You an' yer aunt kin go along with him.

RONALD: Wonderful! But – what'll we do till tomorrow?

BONNIE: They could stay hyar – couldn't they, Pa?

PA: Reckon. Though I don't hold mech with city folks. Take too many baths effen ya ast me. They cain't be healthy.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Shuddering.)* I wouldn't think of staying in this awful place!

RONALD: What alternative would you suggest, Aunt Lucy? Sleeping out with the mountain lions? *(To PA.)* We'll pay you well.

PA: No need. Niver turned down nobody whut needed help. Come on, kids. We better tell Ma t' put water in the sow's belly soup.

Exit Pa and Bonnie Mae through the door right. Ceelie hovers up center, still staring at Ronald.

MRS. MAXWELL: Sow's belly soup! Indeed!

RONALD: *(Smiling; going to table right.)* I still say, Aunt Lucy, this was your idea.

MRS. MAXWELL: I did it for you, dear. One more year in medical school and you'll be a licensed physician!

RONALD: You don't need to remind me, Aunt Lucy. I've worked hard to be at the head of my class. *(Dreamily.)* Doctor Ronald Maxwell . . .

MRS. MAXWELL: That sounds wonderful! But this passion you have for charity work and doctoring people who can't pay for it! You'll never become successful that way!

RONALD: (*Gravely.*) There are different kinds of success, Aunt Lucy.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Impatiently.*) Only one that counts. That's why I wanted you to come on this trip. I wanted you to get your fill of poverty. Perhaps it's just as well this happened. Living with these – people – might make you see the light. Money is one of the most important things in life, Ronald! Let somebody else do the charity work.

RONALD: When Mother and Dad were killed in that car accident their will left me financially independent for life and you know it, Aunt Lucy! I'd be a good man for the clinics. Let the other doctors who aren't as wealthy go for the money.

MRS. MAXWELL: But those nasty, smelly people! You're one of the elite, Ronald. You should stay with your own kind. I'm sure your dear, dead parents would have agreed with me!

RONALD: I'm sure they wouldn't have!

MRS. MAXWELL: I knew them longer than you. They had confidence in my judgement or they wouldn't have appointed me to be your guardian.

RONALD: You were their only living relative.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Genuinely hurt.*) Ronald! I've always treated you as if you were my own son!

RONALD: (*Biting his lip.*) I'm sorry, Aunt Lucy. You've been wonderful in so many ways. Only –

CEELIE: (*Coming forward.*) Gee! Be ya really a doctor, mister?

RONALD: (*Laughing.*) Well – almost.

CEELIE: The only doctor I ever seed wuz old an' had whiskers. 'Course, he died three winters ago.

RONALD: There's another doctor around now, of course.

CEELIE: Nope.

RONALD: Well, what do you do when you get sick?

CEELIE: Wal – ya git well or ya die.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Impatiently.*) Why do you bother talking to her, Ronald? She looks as if she hasn't taken a bath for a month.

CEELIE: (*Scratching.*) Ain't niver tuck one.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Turning her back.*) Oh dear!

Enter Pa through the door right.

PA: Ma sez the lady kin sleep on our bed by the kitchen stove fer tonight. We'll sleep out hyar on the floor with the young 'ens. I told Ma ya wuz fancy folks. The young feller kin curl up on the carpet by the bed.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Turning to him.*) I presume you've changed the bed sheets?

PA: Whut sheets?

MRS. MAXWELL: This is intolerable!

RONALD: I think it's fun. Sleeping on the floor will be a new experience.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sighing.*) I suppose we'll have to make the best of it at any rate. If you don't mind, I'd like to wash up a bit.

PA: Effen ya kin stand hit, go ahead.

MRS. MAXWELL: You have a - bathroom?

CEELIE: Thar be a pump—jest outside.

PA: (*Bellowing.*) Hey! Dump the applesauce out of the basin fer a spell! The old lady wants t' take a bath!

MRS. MAXWELL: Old lady!

PA: (*Still yelling off right.*) An' git some rags outa the dog's bed. Maybe she'll wanna dry herself!

MRS. MAXWELL: Ohh – I think I'm going to faint!

RONALD: (*Going to her and putting his arms about her shoulders.*) We'll step outside and get some fresh air, Aunt Lucy.

Exit Ronald and Mrs. Maxwell up left.

FIVE: (*Entering with basin and rags, right.*) Hyar be the stuff, Pa. Ma sent along some of her lye soap too.

PA: Take 'em out to the pump.

Exit Five up left.

CEELIE: Pa! Pa!

PA: Huh?

CEELIE: (*Excited.*) Bonnie Mae wuz right! I niver coulda stood Chiz Upschlager! This be the feller I want!

PA: Thet dude?

CEELIE: I tuck a shine t' him, Pa! He smells so gol durn purty!

PA: (*Getting the gun from the fireplace up right.*) Effen thet's the one ya want, Ceelie, thet's the one yer gittin'! Er my name ain't Joshua Horatio Belsnickle!

Exit Pa, crouching with gun, and Ceelie toward door up left as the curtain falls.

ACT TWO

SETTING: *The setting is the same as ACT ONE. It is about noon.*

AT RISE: *Pa and Ceelie are sitting on the bench left, looking very dejected. The gun has been returned to its position above the fireplace. Ma is facing them, center stage. She is very angry.*

MA: *(Hands on hips.)* An' thet's the last trouble I want out of you two today! Ain't I got enough to do whut with these hyar strangers – her as fussy as a lost polecat—an' all our cousins comin' fer a visit. I gotta git.

PA: *(Whining.)* But ya told me t' git a husband fer Ceelie!

MA: Fer the last time, Pa, effen Ceelie wants thet dude, ya gotta catch him fair an' square! Ya cain't shoot a dude fer a husband. It jest ain't fashionable no more!

CEELIE: I don't see why not! Hit wouldn't hurt him—mech.

MA: Wal, hit might uv been all right effen ya'd hit him the first time. But I don't want ya tryin' again! Them city constables'd be up hyar in no time t' take him away from ya anyhow.

CEELIE: Effen only Pa wouldn't uv missed . . .

PA: *(Injured.)* Tweren't my fault I got excited when his aunt fainted because she dropped her glove in the soapy water n' the glove dissolved.

MA: *(Offended.)* Maybe the lye soap is a little strong but effen ya ast me thet glove couldn't uv been made of very good material! Sech goings on! You two oughta be skinned fer hurtin' Five!

CEELIE: 'Tweren't Pa's fault Five wuz in the way when he shot!

MA: He should uv been mindin' his P's and' Q's! Tuck us half an hour t' pick the buckshot outa Five. She won't be able t' sit down fer a week! I don't wanna have no more shootin'! An now I gotta git an' fry up a big pan o' hog brains fer the cousins! They kin eat a body out o' house an' home!

Exit Ma through the door right.

CEELIE: Gosh hang it, Pa! Whut air we going t' do now?

PA: *(Sighing.)* Dad rat effen I know.

CEELIE: *(Rising.)* I gotta git thet dude, Pa! I – I'd even give up my rattlesnakes fer him. *(Ceelie goes to the chair up left and takes up the box. She removes the lid and lovingly looks into it.)* 'Course, maybe I wouldn't have to. Maybe he'd like rattlesnakes too onct he got to knowed 'em.

PA: *(Looking sharply at her.)* Thar just ain't no way t' git thet fancy dude t' marry up with the likes of you, Ceelie!

CEELIE: *(Coming downstage.)* Thar must be a way, Pa.

PA: I wonder whut ya'd look like effen ya wuzn't dirty, Ceelie . . .

CEELIE: *(Backing away.)* Pa – ya don't mean hit! Ya wouldn't make me take a bath!

PA: Everybuddy has got t' take a bath onct in thar lives, Ceelie. Hit don't hurt none.

CEELIE: *(Hastily replacing the lid on the box and placing it on the window sill, left.)* Ain't thar no other way, Pa? I could bake a pie fer him maybe!

PA: Ya cain't bake.

CEELIE: Maybe I could make a pair of socks fer him!

PA: *(Rising.)* Ya cain't sew either.

CEELIE: *(Nervously backing to center stage.)* Wal, I'm still the best hog caller in Cornfed County!

PA: *(Moving slowly after her.)* Thet wouldn't make no difference t' him. No, Ceelie! Ya gotta take a bath an' comb yer hair an' fix up! The water trough's jest outside.

CEELIE: *(Still backing away.)* But I ain't niver combed my hair in my life, Pa!

PA: *(Crouching ready for the "kill.")* Ya gotta now! Ma sez yer gittin hitched an' I aim t' see thet ya do!

CEELIE: *(Backing into the wall right; realizing she is trapped.)* No, Pa! Not a bath!

PA: Yer puttin' on a clean dress too!

CEELIE: I only wore this one three months!

Pa pounces and grabs her. She bellows as he drags her toward the door up left. They exit. For a second there is silence. Then Ceelie's voice is heard, off stage left, crying, "No, Pa! Thet's water!" A loud splash follows as Bonnie Mae and Ronald enter through the door right. She carries a book.

RONALD: What on earth is that?

There is quite a bit of commotion off stage left with Ceelie yelling and the sound of splashing water.

BONNIE: Sounds like Pa's giving Ceelie a bath!

RONALD: (*Curious.*) Do you mean she really hasn't had a bath in years?

BONNIE: (*Nodding and turning her face from him.*) It's hard fer ya t' believe folks live like thet, ain't it?

RONALD: (*Lightly.*) A little. What's wrong, Bonnie Mae?

BONNIE: N-nothin', Ronald, I –

RONALD: Are you ashamed of your family?

BONNIE: (*Head drooping.*) Yes. Yes, I am ashamed.

RONALD: (*Gently.*) They can't help that they're poor and have never been taught to live differently.

BONNIE: (*Turning sharply to face him.*) Thet ain't so! The schoolmarm tried to teach 'em! Only they won't listen. She even boarded hyar fer a spell till she couldn't stand it no more. If they wuzn't nothing else – they could be clean. Thet ain't askin' too mech!

RONALD: If you feel so strongly, why don't you leave the hills? You could go into town where people are clean and at least make a pretense at civilization.

BONNIE: (*Moving left center.*) You don't understand. I – I love the hills and the people. (*Turning to face him.*) They're my – people! I don't wanna go away frum them. I'd like to help them live better so's they'd be happier.

RONALD: (*Going to her.*) That's wonderful, Bonnie Mae! (*He puts his arm around her shoulders and gives her an involuntary hug.*) That's the way I feel about people, too.

BONNIE: (*Still close to him; looking up into his eyes.*) But it's different with you. You're going to be a doctor. You can really help people. But me – whut kin I do?

RONALD: (*Cupping her chin in his hand and looking down at her.*) You've got the most beautiful brown eyes . . .

BONNIE: I do?

RONALD: And the greatest smile . . .

BONNIE: I do?

There is a moment of silence, during which time Ronald lowers his head until a kiss seems certain. Abruptly, he straightens and moves away from her. Bonnie Mae's happiness turns to pain. She swallows hard and clutches the book to her chest.

RONALD: *(Trying to change the subject.)* I'm glad I was around to help with your sister – what's her name? Five? *(Bonnie Mae nods absently.)* Buckshot can be very painful. Strange how your father's gun went off accidentally that way. *(Indicating the book.)* What are you reading?

BONNIE MAE: *(Straightening her shoulders and trying to appear as if nothing had happened.)* It's an arithmetic book. I wuz teachin' myself fractions.

RONALD: How can you concentrate around here?

BONNIE: *(Laughing.)* It **is** kinda noisy. I go down the hill to the spring house. It's purty thar – lots of moss an' ferns an' little pink flowers. An' – forget-me-nots.

RONALD: *(Moving toward her.)* Bonnie Mae, I –

BONNIE: You don't have to say anything! I understand!

RONALD: *(Troubled.)* I don't think you do. I'd love to see your spring house – and maybe pick some of the forget-me-nots. May I?

BONNIE: I don't know.

RONALD: Please, Bonnie Mae! I'd like to talk to you.

The commotion off stage has ceased. Obeey and Chiz Upschlager enter through the door up left. They pause when they see Ronald.

OBEERY: So ya do have a dude livin' hyar!

BONNIE: *(Moving away from Ronald.)* News certainly travels fast!

CHIZ: *(Curiously moving to Ronald and inspecting him.)* Whar'd ya git him?

OBEERY: Is he gonna stay?

BONNIE: This is Ronald Maxwell – Obeey an' Chiz Upschlager. They live down the trail. Ronald's car broke down a mile er so up the road. Him an' his aunt is goin' with Jod tomorrow t' Horsehair Junction.

CHIZ: Ya know, I always wanted t' see a big city like Horsehair Junction.

Enter Pa, carrying Ceelie's dirty dress through door up left.

PA: Hey! Looky hyar!

Enter Ceelie shyly. She pauses. She is clean. Her dress is a worn silk, something that might have been popular in 1931, but it is way too long for her. Her feet are still bare; her straight hair has been parted in the middle and combed straight back where it is secured with a dirty ribbon or string. Dangling over her face from a bobby pin is a huge, artificial flower.

OBEEY: Whut is it?

CHIZ: Hit must be a gal. Nothin' else wears dresses.

OBEEY: Then **who** is it?

PA: (*Proudly; he puts the dirty dress on the chair up right.*) Hit be Ceelie!

CHIZ: Hit cain't be. Hit's clean.

PA: (*Dragging her to center stage.*) Come on, Ceelie! Don't be bashful.

CEELIE: Howdy!

RONALD: (*Gallantly.*) You certainly look fine, Miss Ceelie.

CEELIE: Gorsh!

RONALD: (*Taking Bonnie's arm.*) Now, if you'll excuse us, Miss Bonnie Mae has promised to show me some of the countryside. Good day.

Exit Bonnie Mae and Ronald through the door up left.

CEELIE: Pa! He said I look fine! He said it, Pa! He said it!

PA: Wal – he wuz still in a mighty hurry t' git away frum ya. Come on. Maybe we kin git yer Ma t' bake a cake fer ya t' give t' him.

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CEELIE: Thet'd be swell! All men like cake . . .

Exit Pa and Ceelie through the door right.

CHIZ: Wuz I dreamin' er did you jest see whut I seen?

OBEERY: *(Sitting at table right center.)* I shore did!

CHIZ: Ceelie Belsnickle tuck a bath! An' fer a dude!

OBEERY: Shet yer tater trap!

CHIZ: Whut's eatin' ya, Obeey?

OBEERY: *(Confused.)* Wal – next thing ya know Bonnie Mae'll be fallin' fer him too.

CHIZ: They wuz standin' kinda close when we come in. Ya be sweet on Bonnie Mae, ain't ya, Obeey?

OBEERY: Yep. An' Homer's mighty sweet on Juney Lou. Suppose she git's a hankerin' fer that dude, too?

CHIZ: This ain't good. We gotta git rid o' thet dude!

OBEERY: How? He ain't leavin' on our say-so.

CHIZ: *(Inspired.)* Effen Bonnie Mae wuz t' walk him by the cliff, maybe we could sneak up behind an'—

OBEERY: *(Disgusted.)* Ya cain't do nothin' like thet with furiners! It'd have t' be somethin' thet'd git rid o' the critter in one piece.

CHIZ: *(Sitting on bench left.)* Thet's harder.

OBEERY: *(Thoughtfully.)* Dudes is cowards. Maybe we cud scare him away!

CHIZ: Thar's haunted cabin down by Possum Creek –

OBEERY: No. Dudes don't believe in ghosts.

CHIZ: Now ain't thet funny.

OBEERY: But they know about guns! An' they're afeerd of 'em.

CHIZ: But ya said we shouldn't hurt the critter.

OBEERY: *(Inspired.)* We don't have t' hurt him! *(Rising and going to Chiz.)* If thar wuz feudin' an' shootin' hyarabouts, he'd go quick enough.

CHIZ: Feudin'! Why, we ain't had no feudin' fer twenty years.

OBEERY: I wuzn't thinkin' of no real feud. Jest a make believe one.

CHIZ: *(Scratching his head.)* I don't git hit.

OBEERY: We kin do somethin' t' make Pa Belsnickle start shootin' at us. He's a lazy varmit. So's our Pa. After the feudin's chased thet dude away, we'll tell 'em 'twas all a joke and thet'll be thet.

CHIZ: *(Doubtfully.)* Yer shore?

OBEERY: Yep.

CHIZ: How do ya aim t' start tis hyar feud?

OBEERY: That's easy. All ya gotta do is make like ya wanna kiss Ceelie. Then she'll yell fer her Pa an' the feud'll start.

CHIZ: Ceelie wouldn't yell. She'd be only too glad effen a feller wanten t' kiss her.

OBEERY: Kick her shins at the last minute. That'd make her yell!

CHIZ: Reckon. *(Rising.)* Wal – I'll wait outside whilst ya do hit, Obeey.

OBEERY: Hold on thar! You're the one whut's gonna do hit.

CHIZ: Who – me?!

OBEERY: Yep.

CHIZ: Oh, no! Hit wuz yer idea!

OBEERY: Shore. I done all the thinkin'. We gotta be fair an' square! You do hit; I done the thinkin'.

CHIZ: But I don't –

OBEERY: I'll be waitin' right outside, Chiz.

CHIZ: But—

OBEERY: So long.

Exit Obeey through door up left.

CHIZ: *(Frightened.)* Obeey?!

Enter Mrs. Maxwell and Ronald through the door right.

RONALD: Aunt Lucy, I insist upon knowing why you called me. Bonnie Mae was showing me around the place. It was interesting.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Dryly. She is wearing her suit without the fur jacket; her handbag and gloves are also gone.)* Yes, you seemed very interested. *(Seeing Chiz.)* Oh, dear! There is absolutely no private place to talk around here!

CHIZ: Excuse me, ma'am! *(He hurries up left.)* Obeey! Obeey, ya git back hyar! I ain't gonna do hit! I don't –

Exit Chiz through the door up left.

RONALD: Just because they're poor, is no excuse to be rude. They've been very hospitable to us.

MRS. MAXWELL: That – that Mr. Belsnickle and his gun! (*Shuddering.*) We'll probably all be murdered in our beds tonight!

RONALD: You're being far too dramatic, Aunt Lucy. Anyone can have an accident with a shotgun.

MRS. MAXWELL: Why was he carrying it in the first place?

RONALD: Perhaps he was shooting rats. (*Indicating the gun above the fireplace.*) Anyway, it is back in its place now, so let's stop worrying.

MRS. MAXWELL: I can't help it, Ronald. I'm worried sick.

RONALD: There's nothing to worry about. Tomorrow we'll go into that small town, telephone the garage, we'll probably have to spend the night there, but I'm sure we can find a hotel.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Sitting on bench left.*) I was thinking of other things. Not just the physical danger.

RONALD: What do you mean?

MRS. MAXWELL: You're becoming so friendly with these – natives. This Bonnie Mae person, for example.

RONALD: (*Exasperated.*) Aunt Lucy! I enjoy talking to her. She's a fine girl.

MRS. MAXWELL: (*Haughtily.*) It is very obvious how much you enjoy it! Nobody living in a place like this could be fine! I wish you'd ignore her. After all, one of your social standing—

RONALD: Aunt Lucy! I'm sorry, but I will not listen to any more of this.

Exit Ronald through the door right.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well!

Enter Bonnie Mae through the door up left. She begins to cross the stage toward the door, right.

BONNIE: Howdy, Miz Maxwell.

MRS. MAXWELL: Just a moment!

BONNIE: (*Stopping respectfully beside her.*) Yes, ma'am?

MRS. MAXWELL: I just wanted to talk to you a bit. It is rather lonely around here, is it not?

BONNIE: Yes, ma'am effen yer not used to hit.

MRS. MAXWELL: I miss the excitement and activity of our life in the city. Has Ronald told you anything about it? I've noticed you two talking quite a bit.

BONNIE: (*Blushing.*) I reckon I do a lot of the talkin'. An' he tells me about his work – you know, in the hospital. He's so anxious t' git out an' be workin' all the time wit sick people instead of jest studyin'. He ain't said mech about his home.

MRS. MAXWELL: I'm surprised. We have a large, beautiful home with our own private swimming pool. The house has ten rooms and we have two servants and a gardener. You know . . . one of the servants reminds me of you. Of course, there would be no need for Ronald to mention that. He never notices the servants. They're so far beneath him.

BONNIE: I – I remind you of one of your servants?

MRS. MAXWELL: Very much so. Oh, please don't be ashamed. My servant is a lovely girl! She scrubs the floors and never causes me any trouble. She – knows her place.

BONNIE: (*Crestfallen.*) I – I see.

MRS. MAXWELL: You should see the girls Ronald dates! They're all from the country club, of course, and their clothes are unbelievable! Beautiful girls! Once, he dated a European Princess!

BONNIE: (*Fingering her shabby dress.*) A real princess?

MRS. MAXWELL: Oh, quite. She was a very kind girl, too. She gave some of her old clothes to our servant girl. Wasn't that kind of her?

BONNIE: (*Her eyes on the floor.*) Y-Yes.

MRS. MAXWELL: Incidentally, I have an old dress for which I have no use in my suitcase in the car. Would you like to have it? It's far better than anything you have here.

BONNIE: No! No, thank you, Mrs. Maxwell!

With a sob, Bonnie Mae turns and runs out the door up left. Mrs. Maxwell rises with a smug smile.

MRS. MAXWELL: Well, that's that. I don't imagine I need to worry about her anymore.

Exit Mrs. Maxwell through the door up left. Pa and Ceelie enter through the door right.

CEELIE: After all thet trouble t' git Ma t' let me have a pie t' give t' him an' he don't like pies.

PA: *(Scratching his head, thoughtfully.)* Yer shore ya want thet dude, Ceelie? Must be somethin' wrong with him effen he don't like pies.

CEELIE: I don't care, Pa. I want him.

PA: He ain't tuck a shine t' ya since ya tuck a bath. Ceelie, ya'll niver git him unless we use the gun!

CEELIE: But Ma won't let us!

PA: *(Drawing himself to his full height.)* Who's boss around hyar?

CEELIE: Ma.

PA: *(Drooping.)* Reckon she is. *(Snaps fingers.)* Say! Maybe we could arrange hit so's Ma wouldn't know.

CEELIE: Ma knows everything.

PA: Effen we wuz to' have a feud, maybe we could wing him a little under cover of its fire, an' ya'd be married up with him afore Ma knowed whut 'twas all about.

CEELIE: But we ain't feudin' with nobody!

PA: We kin start a feud – jest fer a spell – till we wing the dude.

CEELIE: How air ya aimin' t' do thet?

PA: Wal, effen Chiz er Obeey wuz t' offer t' kiss ya, I could come out an' start shootin'. Thet'd start a feud right enough.

CEELIE: *(Twisting on her foot, coyly.)* Aw, Pa! They'd niver offer t' kiss me!

PA: Make 'em!

CEELIE: Effen I'd a knowed how I'd a been married up long ago.

PA: Gals is supposed to know them things. *(He gets the chair up right and places it directly center stage.)* Set! *(She sits in the chair. Pa looks her over.)* Whut we need is soft lights an' sweet music. Won't work effen he kin see ya too good. *(Pa goes to the window left and pulls down the shade; he goes to the door up left and closes it. The stage is plunged into darkness.)* Thar we have hit!

CEELIE: *(Whining.)* Hain't soft lights, Pa! Hit's dark!

PA: Ya'll look better thet way. *(He bumps against something.)*
'Tarnation!

CEELIE: Effen Chiz er Obeey break their necks-a-comin', we can't start no feud.

PA: Wal –

CEELIE: Jest a little light, Pa!

He opens the door up left a bit. The stage becomes softly illuminated.

PA: *(Pleased.)* Ya don't look half bad in this light, Ceelie! Now fer the soft music . . . I wonder effen the cousins have come yet! *(Pa dashes to door right and yells at the top of his lungs.)* Hey! Ma! Have the cousins come yet?

MA: *(Off stage.)* Yep! An' they're eatin' already.

PA: Tell 'em to come an' bring thar music.

Enter Zeke with a musical instrument.

ZEKE: Ya wanted somethin'?

PA: Howdy, cousin Zeke! Kin ya stand in hyar an' play fer a spell?

ZEKE: *(Brightening.)* But I didn't thunk ya liked our music!

PA: Now – whuevir give ya thet idee?

ZEKE: Wal, I got the idee last time we visited hyar an' I caught ya trying t' throw our instruments in the lake. An' I wuz pretty well sertain of hit when ya set fire t' the cabin when we wuz a playin'.

PA: Hit be yer imagination, cousin Zeke! I love t' hear ya play!

ZEKE: Wal, effen ya really want us to – *(Yelling.)* cousins!

A slovenly crew with various hillbilly band instruments enter and group around Zeke, right.

ZEKE: Pa Belsnickle wants music. Let's give him some!

They begin to play – very loudly and very much off-tune. Pa winces.

CEELIE: *(Shouting above them.)* Thet be soft, sweet music, Pa?

PA: Hesh, Ceelie! I'm gonna find Chiz er Obeey. Ya stay settin' thar!

Exit Pa through door right. Obeey and Chiz appear at the door up left. Obeey is visible only for an instant as he shoves a reluctant Chiz into the room, then he exits. The musicians, oblivious to everything, continue to grind out their music. When the dialogue begins again, their music softens in order not to drown out the words. Chiz stares at them, puzzled, then spots Ceelie and groans aloud.

CEELIE: *(Turning.)* Howdy, Chiz. Thought fer a minute Ma'd let the mule in ter sleep agin. Ya sounded like a mule.

CHIZ: I'd druther be a mule this minute!

CEELIE: Druther be a horse myself.

CHIZ: By the looks of yer face, ya ain't got fur t' go.

CEELIE: Huh?

CHIZ: Nothin'. Uh – ya like music, Ceelie? Thet is whut thet noise is, ain't it?

CEELIE: Yep. Thet's music. Soft music.

CHIZ: Thet's soft?

CEELIE: *(Suddenly rising and looking into his eyes less than an inch from his face.)* Romantic, too.

CHIZ: *(Jumping backward.)* Don't do thet!

CEELIE: Did I skeer ya?

Obeey appears at the door up left. He frantically makes motions to Chiz. He circles his arms in the air around an imaginary waist and with puckered lips, kisses the air. Chiz motions him away and sticks out his tongue.

CEELIE: *(Staring at Chiz.)* Whut ails ya?

CHIZ: *(Making motions as if he were swatting at a fly; Obeey hastily exits.)* Flies. Gotta chase 'em.

CEELIE: Whut wuz ya tryin' t' do? Ketch 'em with yer tongue?

CHIZ: *(Clearing his throat.)* Ya know Ceelie, thet bath brought somethin' outa ya.

CEELIE: Shore did! Ya shoulda seen thet water!

CHIZ: Thet wuzn't whut I meant! I mean yer – almost purty?

He begins to pursue her around the chair; at the same time she pursues him. They circle around the chair, faster and faster, until they're running. Suddenly, Ceelie grabs the seat of his pants; at the same time he grabs her arm. They stop.

CEELIE: Whut in tarnation do ya think yer doin'?

CHIZ: *(Bravely.)* I'm a-gonna kiss ya!

CEELIE: *(Dismayed.)* Ya air?

They release their holds. Chiz, his eyes closed and one hand holding his nose, lightly kisses her.

CEELIE: *(Very softly.)* Help. *(He kicks her shins.)* HELP!

The musicians stop immediately.

ZEKE: Thet polecat kissed our cousin Ceelie! Let's git him, fellers!

CHIZ: *(Backing away.)* Huh?

ZEKE: Pa Belsnickle!

COUSIN #1: Let's git his whole family!

COUSIN #2: Ain't had a good feud in twenty years!

CHIZ: Obeey! Obeey!

He dashes out the door up left. From the right, Pa, Ma, Juney Lou, Bonnie Mae, Four, Five, Six, Mrs. Maxwell, and Ronald enter. They flock to center stage. Ceelie moves left.

MA: Whut's a-goin' on?

ZEKE: Some durn polecat kissed Ceelie! We aim t' git him!

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PA: (*Pleased.*) Ya do?

ZEKE: Got some extra guns, Pa?

PA: In the shed!

ZEKE: After 'em!

The cousins rush out the door up left.

JUNEY LOU: But who air they aimin' t' fight?

CEELIE: The Upschlagers! Chiz kissed me!

JUNEY LOU: The Upschlagers! PA! Ya gotta stop 'em? Maybe Homer'll git hurt!

PA: Aw, we'll stop 'em after while. After we have some fun.

MA: Ya think ya kin stop the cousins once they start somethin'? I could niver stop 'em from eatin'.

PA: (*Uncomfortably.*) Wal . . .

A volley of shots sounds off stage, left. The noise can be made with cap pistols or simply by clapping two pieces of 2 x 4 lumber together.

JUNEY LOU: (*Frantic.*) Ya gotta stop hit, Pa!

BONNIE MAE: Yes! Now – afore hit's too late! Effen anybody gits killed –

MA: A feud like thet could last thirty years!

MRS. MAXWELL: Ohhh! This is horrible!

SIX: I think it's fun.

FIVE: Me too!

They rush to the window, left, and put up the shade; the stage brightens again.

JUNEY LOU: (*Rushing after them and pulling them away from the window.*) Ya wanna git shot? They ain't playin'!

CEELIE: (*Moving to Pa, center.*) Pa! Whut air we gonna do?

PA: (*Helplessly.*) I don't know . . .

CEELIE: Stop the feud, Pa!

PA: I – I don't know how!

More shots off stage.

RONALD: This is ridiculous! All this shooting over a kiss!

BONNIE: Ya won't think hit's so funny effen **you** git shot!

MRS. MAXWELL: My Ronald! Get shot!

A loud, single shot sounds off stage, left. The box of rattlesnakes falls to the floor. This can be accomplished by having a stage hand with a stick push them off the window sill as the shot sounds.

MA: The rattlesnakes!

CEELIE: They shot my box of rattlesnakes off the window sill!

Juney Lou, while the others ad-lib exclamations of horror, stoops behind the bench, left, where the box has fallen. Suddenly, she straightens with a scream.

JUNEY LOU: *(Holding a handkerchief over the spot on her arm.)* It bit me! It bit me! The rattlesnakes are loose!

Mrs. Maxwell groans loudly and sinks to the floor in a faint. There is general movement. Ma jumps up on the chair, center. Five and Six clamber onto the chair up right. They scream as they do so.

CEELIE: My pet rattlesnakes!

JUNEY LOU: *(Running to Pa.)* Give me yer knife, Pa!

PA: *(Handing her a pocket knife.)* But, Juney Lou – *(She removes the handkerchief a notch and pretends to make a gash with the knife. She returns it to Pa.)*

PA: I feel sick –

RONALD: *(Going to Juney Lou.)* We must get clean bandages!

JUNEY LOU: I cut it. I gotta suck the poison out or I'll die!

BONNIE MAE: *(Compassionately.)* Oh, Juney Lou!

MA: Tell 'em to stop shootin'! We gotta git the rest o' them rattlesnakes! They'll kill us all, loose in hyar!

PA: *(Running to the door up left.)* I'll tell 'em!

Pa exits momentarily; Bonnie Mae and Ronald support Juney Lou who seems on the verge of fainting. Mrs. Maxwell still lies where she has fallen.

RONALD: I've got some anti-toxin in a bag in the car! It's just the thing for rattlesnake bites. I knew my aunt and I would be in wild country –

MA: Then git it! She cain't die!

JUNEY LOU: Oh, Homer! Effen only Homer wuz hyar!

RONALD: As soon as the shooting stops, I'll go to the car and –

Another round of shots sounds off stage and Pa reenters, hat in hand. He holds it up, one of his fingers through a small, round hole.

PA: They won't stop. That's thar answer! They shot through my hat! Next time it'll be through my haid effen I go out agin!

RONALD: Juney Lou'll die in a few hours if we don't get that anti-toxin out of my car.

BONNIE: *(To Ronald.)* Wal, go git hit. We'll take care of her till ya git back!

RONALD: No!

BONNIE: Why not? Ya said she'd die without hit!

RONALD: *(Nervously.)* But the shooting! I'm not good at this sort of thing – I've never been around anything like this before in my life. I can't dodge those bullets. I might get killed! I'm not going out there!

BONNIE: *(Almost weeping.)* And I wuz thinkin' you wuz somebody! You ain't nobody, Ronald Maxwell! You ain't nobody but a yellow-bellied coward! *(Blackout.)*

ACT THREE

SETTING: *The same as ACT TWO. It is night time.*

AT RISE: *The lamp has been returned to the table right center. Mrs. Maxwell stands on the bench, left. She has discarded the coat to her suit. She stands, tightly holding her skirt above her knees and looking frantically around the room. Ceelie, holding a big club, is prowling the room, looking at the floor.*

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Nervously.)* Do y-you see any?

CEELIE: Nope. Ain't seed one since they broke loose! They'll pop out at somebody when they're least expectin' hit.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Groaning.)* Ohhhh! If only Ronald would come back! I'm so afraid he'll be killed with all that shooting out there.

CEELIE: Hit be too dark fer mech shootin' now.

MRS. MAXWELL: But he's been gone so long! For all I know, he may be lying dead somewhere! That horrid Bonnie Mae person! She made him go!

CEELIE: *(Still prowling.)* All she done wuz t' call him a coward. An' she wuz right.

MRS. MAXWELL: He's not a coward!

CEELIE: Nope. Not after Bonnie Mae got through callin' him names! He got so gol danged mad, he ripped outa hyar t' git thet medicine!

The door up left slowly opens and a foot appears. Ceelie stalks it, club poised.

MRS. MAXWELL: *(Too engrossed in her own fears to notice them.)*

It was bright daylight when he left. I can't believe it would take him so long to reach the car. I just know something's happened to the dear boy! Oh, it's all my fault! I never should have brought him on this horrid vacation! He didn't want to come. If he's killed it'll be a judgment on me for trying to keep him from the work he wanted to do! I see it all now! He feels his calling in charity work and I never should have interfered. I did it because I love him and now he might hate me! If he's alive . . . oh! What a proud fool I've been!

By this time, Ceelie has almost reached the foot. She raises her club high and brings it down upon the foot. Mrs. Maxwell jumps. Obeey screams and enters hopping on one foot and holding the other in agony.

CEELIE: (*Amazed.*) Hit be Obeey!

OBEY: Whut'd ya do hit fer, Ceelie? Hit would uv been kinder t' shoot me!

CEELIE: I though yer foot wuz one o' them gol-danged snakes!

OBEY: Ceelie! I never heerd ya talk theta way about yer rattlesnakes afore!

CEELIE: One of 'em bit Juney Lou an' maybe she's gonna die. (*Very sadly.*) I don't care effen I never see another rattlesnake as long as I live!

OBEY: Ya mean hit! (*Seeing Mrs. Maxwell, he puts his sore foot down but continues to limp.*) Whut's she actin' up fer?

CEELIE: The snakes air loose. She figures they won't git her up thar.

OBEY: I see one!

CEELIE/MRS. MAXWELL: Where?

OBEY: Crawling up the leg o' the bench she's on!

Mrs. Maxwell screams, jumps down and runs out the door right, still screaming. Obeey laughs loudly.

CEELIE: (*Going to the bench with the club.*) Ain't you awful! Thar ain't no snake thar!

OBEY: I know hit. I wanted t' git rid o' her so's we could talk.

CEELIE: Whut's thar t' talk about?

OBEY: This hyar feud! We gotta end hit.

CEELIE: Maybe hit be ended. I ain't heerd no shootin' fer quite a spell.

OBEY: Thet's only cause hit be dark. The moon'll be up bright after while an' hit'll start agin.

CEELIE: Reckon yer right. An' effen any o' my cousins find ya hyar, Obeey Upschlager, ya won't find the place healthy.

Enter Juney Lou through the door right. Her arm is bandaged and she appears to be very dejected.

CEELIE: Juney Lou! How air ya fellin'?

JUNEY LOU: *(Dispiritedly.)* All right.

CEELIE: Does hit hurt mech? The bite, I mean.

JUNEY LOU: *(Sitting at table.)* Nope.

CEELIE: *(Showing great concern.)* Whut ails ya, Juney Lou? Ya gotta perk up. Ya cain't die on us! It'd be all my fault an'—

JUNEY LOU: *(Exasperated.)* Oh, stop hit, Ceelie! Thar ain't nothin' wrong with me!

CEELIE: *(Puzzled.)* But the snake bite—

JUNEY LOU: The snake didn't bite me. I put the lid on the box afore anybody seed thet none of 'em got out.

OBEY: Ya mean the snakes are still in the box? They didn't git out at all?

JUNEY LOU: Thet's right. Everybody wuz so worried about me thet they didn't bother t' look. I jest told Ma all about hit too.

CEELIE: B-but—

JUNEY LOU: *(Crossly.)* Oh, don't look at me thetaway! I only said I wuz bit so's they'd stop this silly feud an' wouldn't hurt Homer. *(Near tears.)* But it didn't stop the feud. An' thet dude's probably been killed – an' hit be all my fault!

CEELIE: But ya cut a snake bite with Pa's knife! I seen ya!

JUNEY LOU: Oh, Ceelie! Ya always wuz the dumbest one in the family. I got the knife an' cut my arm quick so's effen anybody seed hit they wouldn't know there wasn't no bite.

CEELIE: *(Going to the bench left and lifting the box. She looks inside.)* Yep! Hyar they air! Every snake!

ZEKE: *(Off stage right.)* Let's git movin' agin, boys! We ate everything in sight!

CEELIE: The cousins! *(She replaces the snake box.)* They be comin' this way!

JUNEY LOU: *(Rising.)* They'll kill Obeey effen they find him, then this hyar feud'll niver end!

OBEY: I'm gittin'! *(He dashes for the door up left. He stops when he peers out.)* Ya got more relatives than I evir seed! Thar be more a-comin' this way!

JUNEY LOU: He niver shoulda come hyar!

CEELIE: *(Seeing her dirty dress on chair up right.)* Come on! *(She dashes up right and holds up a dress.)* Put this on!

OBEETY: *(Backing away.)* Huh? I'd rather be daid!

ZEKE: *(Off stage.)* Hurry up, cousins! Afore we leave, we gotta get every Upschlager in the valley!

Obeety runs to Ceelie, grabs dress, and hurriedly gets into it. The girls roll up his pants.

JUNEY LOU: His hair! What air we going to do about his hair?

CEELIE: *(Grabbing the ribbon from Juney Lou's hair.)* This hyar'll do hit!

She ties the ribbon in Obeety's hair. Juney Lou gets the tube of lipstick from her pocket and smears some on his mouth. Obeety starts scratching.

OBEETY: I knowed I shouldn't put on yer dress, Ceelie!

JUNEY LOU: *(Hearing noise off right.)* Hesh! Hyar they come!

The girls stand in front of Obeety, shielding him from the door, right. It opens and the cousins enter.

ZEKE: *(Suspiciously.)* Who air ya hidin'?

CEELIE: *(Jumping away.)* Nobody, Zeke!

ZEKE: *(Seeing Obeety who is still scratching.)* Wal!

JUNEY LOU: This be—uh, Rosie Belle, cousin Zeke!

ZEKE: *(Wolfishly moving up to them.)* She's mighty purty. Why ain't we niver met afore, Rosie Belle? Yer as purty as the flowers a-growin' on the dump in the holler.

OBEETY: *(Simpering and moving to center stage as he speaks falsetto.)* Ohhh . . . you naughty boy! I bet you say that to all the gals.

ZEKE: Shore! But when I say hit to you, I mean hit. Ya got a feller?

JUNEY LOU: *(Hastily.)* Shore she has, Zeke. She couldn't be bothered with you.

ZEKE: I'll go git my shotgun!

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OBEERY: Juney Lou were only foolin'! I ain't got no feller!

ZEKE: Wanna stroll down Lover's Lane in the moonlight?

OBEERY: W-W-Who-m-m-m-me?

JUNEY LOU: Rosie Bells's very bashful, cousin Zeke!

COUSIN #1: Come on, Zeke! We got shootin' t' do!

ZEKE: You fellers go ahead. I'll ketch up.

The cousins exit up left.

CEELIE: Ain't ya afeered they'll git lost without ya, cousin Zeke?

ZEKE: Nope. How about hit, Rosie Belle? Lover's Lane's very purty this time o' year.

OBEERY: Oh, you embarrass me so!

Obeery continues to scratch. He scratches his leg around the knee vigorously. As a result one trouser leg, not securely fastened, comes sliding down. Juney Lou and Ceelie, up stage right, see it and gesture frantically at him. He frowns at them, trying to comprehend.

ZEKE: I'd like t' show ya my hogs too – got sixteen of 'em. (*He begins to scratch; he has been standing close to Obeery.*) I figured when they wuz old enough t' butcher, I'd have enough t' git hitched on. Rosie Belle, ain't ya payin' me no mind?

OBEERY: (*Returning to Zeke.*) Shore I wuz! Ya said—?

ZEKE: I wuz tellin' ya about my hogs!

OBEERY: (*Looking at the girls again.*) Oh, yes! Hogs is very sweet critters.

ZEKE: Sweet? Rosie Belle, is thar anything the matter with ya?

Juney Lou and Ceelie rush up to them. Ceelie throws both arms around Zeke's neck and spins him to face right. Juney Lou points to the trouser leg; Obeery sees it and frantically begins to roll it up again while Juney Lou stands between him and Zeke.

CEELIE: Oh, cousin Zeke! I reckon I niver thanked ya fer startin' this feud fer me!

ZEKE: (*Trying to pry her loose.*) Wal, I'd druther have Rosie Belle do the thankin'. Maybe ya could ast her to?

CEELIE: But I wanna thank ya! *(She kisses him on the cheek.)*
Thar!

ZEKE: *(Wiping his cheek.)* Reminds me o' the time Ma threw a wet
pickle in my face 'cause I wouldn't bring in no kinlin'.

Ceelie looks at Juney Lou, who shakes her head. Obeey is not yet finished.

CEELIE: *(Kissing him once more on the cheek.)* Thanks agin'!

ZEKE: I recollect now. Ma threw two wet pickles right after each
other. *(He breaks away.)* Stop hit, Ceelie! Ya want me t' lose my
supper?

Obeey straightens.

JUNEY LOU: Cousin Zeke, don't ya think ya better git out thar with
the others? They'll be mighty fur ahead of ya!

ZEKE: *(Reluctantly.)* Wal – maybe so. Rosie Belle, will ya wait right
hyar fer me?

OBEEY: *(Scratching again.)* Oh, shore! Jest you run along.

ZEKE: *(Also scratching.)* Ya better mean whut ya say, too! Nobody
breaks a promise t' me.

Zeke exits up left.

OBEEY: *(Groaning and sitting on bench left.)* Now he's gonna be
after me double! Once 'cause I'm an Upschlager an' once cause
I'm Rosie Belle!

JUNEY LOU: I'm sorry, Obeey. But it seemed the only thing to do.

OBEEY: I know. *(Rising.)* I better git out o' this rig!

Enter Ma, Pa, Bonnie Mae, Four, Five, and Six through the door right.

PA: Juney Lou! What's this Ma's been tellin' me? Ya ain't got no
snake bite?

JUNEY LOU: Thet's right, Pa.



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