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A Christmas Comedy in One Act

by

LeROMA ESHBACH GRETH

A Hillbilly
Christmas Carol



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(A HILLBILLY CHRISTMAS CAROL)

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A Hillbilly Christmas Carol

A Christmas Comedy in One Act
FOR THREE MEN AND FOUR WOMEN

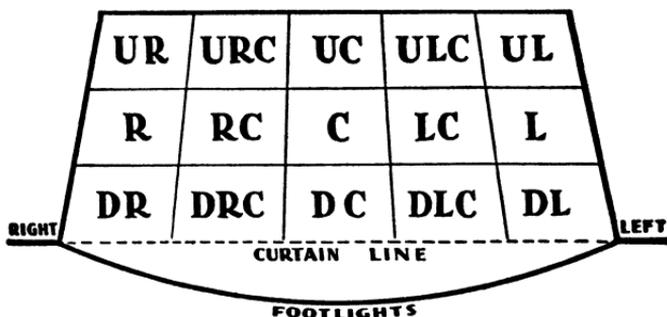
CHARACTERS

JOSHUA FRUNHEISER *a modern Scrooge*
THE WIDOW HINKLY *with a roving eye*
HIRAM HINKLY *her lazy son*
CORABELLE HINKLY *her daughter*
LIZZIE ANN }
MINNIE SU } *Joshua's nieces and nephew*
OSSIE }

PLACE: *A room in Joshua Frunheiser's cabin in the Ozarks.*

TIME: *The present. Christmas Eve.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Couch, blanket, pillow, table, five chairs, kerosene lamp, tattered green shade on window (optional), trash.

WIDOW: Paper bag supposedly containing a pie.

HIRAM: Small Christmas tree trimmed with a few broken balls, dirty tinsel and paper ornaments; old automobile chains or a number of tin cans tied together.

LIZZIE: Bundle of clothing, very small untrimmed Christmas tree, three candles in holders.

MINNIE: Bundle of clothing.

CORA BELLE: Basket of food.

OSSIE: Candle in holder, bundle of clothing. (Following are brought in by Ossie, Minnie and Cora Belle: a few dishes, bouquet of holly or other Christmas decorations, cookies or other food and a gaily-colored tablecloth.)

PRODUCTION NOTE

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

A Hillbilly Christmas Carol

SCENE: *A room in Joshua Frunbeiser's cabin in the Ozarks. The room is almost bare and could be mistaken for a pigpen. There is dirt and trash everywhere—in the corners, under the furniture, etc. An old couch sags wearily against the wall at L stage. It boasts a faded blanket as a coverlet and a dirty pillow without a cover. An old table is at R C stage, surrounded on either side and at the upstage end with wobbly-looking chairs. A kerosene lamp is on the table. There are similar chairs U L and U R. In the L wall, upstage of the couch, is a window. The window is either bare or has a tattered green window shade. There is a door U C, leading outside. A door R opens into the rest of the cabin.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is Christmas Eve. The kerosene lamp is lit. JOSHUA FRUNHEISER is sleeping on the couch, snoring loudly. It has been said of Scrooge that he was a "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner." The same thing may be said of JOSHUA. In addition, he is lazy and dirty. His face is dirty; his clothes are dirty, torn and tattered; his hair needs cutting. He wears large work shoes on his feet and a perpetual scowl on his face. He is about forty-five. After a moment, HIRAM HINKLY pokes his head through the open window U L and observes JOSHUA. HIRAM is sixteen, a big, lazy hillbilly boy. His pants are too short in the legs, too large at the waist and are held up by bright-colored suspenders. He wears a shirt which has been made short-sleeved by the simple process of unevenly cutting off the sleeves. He doesn't wear socks, but he does wear old shoes, and an old muffler is tied about his neck.]*

HIRAM [*yelling as he withdraws his head*]. Hey, Maw! He's asleep! Ya kin do hit now!

WIDOW HINKLY [*off U L*]. Hesh yer tator trap, Hiram Hinkly!
Ya want ter wake up the hogs?

HIRAM [*off U L*]. Aw, him and the hogs both sleep real tight.
They ain't gonna wake.

[*The WIDOW HINKLY enters U C cautiously, with HIRAM and CORA BELLE right behind her. From off R come some annoyed "oinks."* The WIDOW is a neighbor of Joshua, and she'd like to marry him—why, we'll never know. She is a large woman, cheerful and optimistic. She wears an old-fashioned cotton dress, cotton stockings, battered sneakers and a sweater with holes at the elbows. Her hair is pinned on top of her head in a rather untidy fashion. CORA BELLE is a year younger than her brother, and rather pretty. She wears an old dress without a belt, mismatched stockings, old shoes and a worn-out coat many sizes too small for her.]

WIDOW. See? I told ya ya'd wake them.

CORA BELLE. Wal, he shouldn't have the hogs in the house anyhow. [*Goes R and closes door.*] 'Thar. He won't hear 'em now.

HIRAM [*moving L C, looking over JOSHUA*]. I don't see why ya want ter git married up with him anyhow, Maw.

WIDOW [*who has come C*]. He's a man, ain't he?

HIRAM [*with a doubtful glance at JOSHUA*]. Wal . . .

WIDOW. Shore he is.

CORA BELLE [*going L C to stand beside her brother*]. Smells more like a hog.

WIDOW. 'Thet's jest because he's livin' with the hogs. Yer paw— [*Eyes heavenward.*]—rest his soul—did, too, afore he married me. But I chased them hogs out of the cabin.

HIRAM [*still doubtfully, looking over JOSHUA*]. I still think 'thar ought to be somethin' else we cud find fer ya ter marry, Maw.

WIDOW. Men ain't so plentiful hyar in the hills. [*Moves to table R C.*] Now, you go bring hit in, Hiram.

HIRAM. Aw, I'm tired. . . .

WIDOW [*crossing, taking him by ear, pulling him U C*]. Git! Afore I take a horse whip to ya! Bring hit in. Hit'll be a nice surprise fer him when he wakes up. [*Glances over at JOSHUA.*] Pore man! Never had a wife ter brighten up his cabin fer him. Why, he don't even know hit's Christmas Eve! [*HIRAM begrudgingly "gits" through door U C, rubbing his ear.*]

CORA BELLE [*moving R C, sitting right of table*]. Yer shore he's gonna like hit, Maw? He's a mean old polecat.

WIDOW [*moving L C, glancing lovingly at JOSHUA*]. Now you quit talkin' about yer future Paw like thet, Cora Belle!

[*HIRAM enters U C carrying a small Christmas tree. It is the saddest, most discouraged-looking Christmas tree in the world. Most of its needles have fallen off. It is adorned with a few broken balls, some dirty tinsel and two or three paper ornaments.*]

HIRAM [*coming C, dangling it by its tip*]. Hyar ya air.

WIDOW [*beaming*]. Now, ain't thet purty? [*Indicates table R C as she moves R C.*] Set it hyar.

CORA BELLE. Looks kinda scrawny, don't hit?

WIDOW [*as HIRAM stands it on table*]. Maybe hit is a mite pinched—but this was all we had left over from our tree and hit's the spirit thet counts! [*Fusses with some of ornaments.*]

HIRAM [*shoving hands in pockets, moving U L C*]. Wal, I don't like playin' Santa Claus to Joshua Frunheiser! He's the meanest man in these hyar hills. He ain't never give nobody nothin'!

CORA BELLE. He never spends nothin'. Folks say he's a miser.

HIRAM. Yep. I've heard he's got more than a hundred dollars hid someplace 'round hyar. But he'll never spend hit. Too mean to. And he ain't no fittin' man fer ya ter marry up with, Maw.

WIDOW [*still at table, fussing with tree*]. Wal, he ain't asked me yit. But I kin tame him. Tamed yer paw, didn't I?

HIRAM. Yep. Too bad Paw had ter git kicked in the haid by a mule. [JOSHUA *groans and rolls over.*]

CORA BELLE [*rising*]. He's wakin' up; let's git out of hyar!

WIDOW. Maybe hit would be better if he'd see us.

HIRAM [*coming down to her*]. Ya out of yer mind, Maw? Let's git! [JOSHUA *suddenly sits up.*]

JOSHUA. Whut in 'tarnation! . . .

WIDOW [*moving L C*]. Merry Christmas, Joshua! We thought ya might be a mite lonesome over hyar all by yerself on Christmas Eve without no wife ter put up a tree fer ya, so we come over.

CORA BELLE [*edging toward door U C*]. But we're leavin' now. Come on, Maw!

WIDOW. We're havin' turkey tomorrow fer Christmas and we—

JOSHUA [*rising*]. I thought folks wuz supposed ter knock afore they come bargin' in!

WIDOW. We wanted ter surprise ya.

JOSHUA [*pointing to tree*]. Whut's that?

WIDOW. That's yer Christmas tree.

JOSHUA [*crossing R C as HIRAM moves U C, to CORA BELLE*]. Christmas tree! Hit looks more like a refugee from the wood-pile. It's hoggin' up my table. Git hit out of hyar.

WIDOW. But, Joshua—

HIRAM. Maw only wanted ter be nice to ya. Hit's Christmas Eve.

JOSHUA. That don't mean nothin' ter me. A woman yer age goin' around hollerin' about Christmas! That's only fer little kids. Not fer big, overgrown oxes like these, neither. [*Gestures toward HIRAM and CORA BELLE, then starts toward door R.*] Now I'm goin' ter feed my hogs. You jest have thet mess cleaned out of hyar afore I come back! [*Goes out R, slamming door.*]

CORA BELLE [*coming down to her mother*]. Don't feel bad, Maw.

WIDOW [*cheerfully*]. Oh, I ain't feelin' bad, Cora Belle. That's more than one way ter skin a cat. [*Moves to window, glances*

out.] Hmmmmm. The wind is right. Think I'll go back ter our cabin and bake a couple of gooseberry pies. Maybe the smell'll bring him over. He does like ter eat—especially effen hit's free. [*Starts U C.*] Reckon ya better clear out the tree like he sez. [*Goes out U C. HIRAM takes tree and calmly throws it out window. CORA BELLE has moved U C.*]

HIRAM [*dusting his hands*]. Thet's thet.

CORA BELLE. Wish Maw wasn't so set on marryin' up with thet old mule skinner.

HIRAM. She ain't gonna git married up with him. He don't like nothin' er nobody.

LIZZIE [*off U C*]. This must be the place all right.

MINNIE [*off U C*]. Shore looks like hit.

OSSIE [*off U C*]. Ya mean we're gonna stay hyar?

CORA BELLE. Whut's thet?

HIRAM [*turning to look out window as CORA BELLE joins him at window*]. Dunno. Can't be Joshua's hogs, cuz hogs don't talk.

CORA BELLE. Maybe we'd better git.

HIRAM. Too late. Whutever hit is, hit's comin' in.

[*The door U C opens and LIZZIE ANN, MINNIE SU and OSSIE, carrying bundles of clothing, enter. LIZZIE is seventeen, a bright, pretty girl who wears an old dress but manages to wear it neatly. She also wears cotton stockings, old shoes and a sweater, neatly patched at the elbows. MINNIE is fifteen and definitely has an eye for the boys. She is dressed much like her sister. OSSIE is a small boy of twelve or thirteen. He wears faded dungarees, a faded plaid shirt and old shoes.*]

LIZZIE [*moving C, followed by MINNIE and OSSIE*]. Howdy. This be Joshua Frunheiser's cabin?

HIRAM. Reckon.

LIZZIE. You ain't him?

HIRAM. Nope.

LIZZIE. Wal, who be ya?

HIRAM. Neighbor.

LIZZIE. Oh. [*Moves R C and turns.*] Wal, I'm Lizzie Ann and

this be Minnie Su and little Oswin. We call him Ossie.
[OSSIE *moves R C and stands beside LIZZIE.*] Joshua Frun-
heiser's our uncle.

CORA BELLE [*who has been standing by HIRAM near window, staring at newcomers*]. I'm Cora Belle and this be Hiram.

MINNIE. We come ter pay Uncle Joshua a visit. [*Eying HIRAM appreciatively.*] Hit's right nice ter find out he's got such fine neighbors. [*Moves toward HIRAM.*]

HIRAM [*dodging quickly U C, to get away from her*]. We better git back, Cora Belle.

MINNIE [*going after him*]. Don't go! [*Grabs his arm.*]

JOSHUA [*roaring, off R*]. Ya got thet junk out of thar?

HIRAM. He's comin' back!

CORA BELLE [*running U C*]. Let's git! [*She and HIRAM dash out U C. Others stare after them in surprise, MINNIE with some disappointment.*]

OSSIE. Whut be they scared of?

LIZZIE. Can't imagine.

OSSIE. Could hit be Uncle Joshua?

MINNIE. Huh-uh. Maw sez he was the sweetest, nicest little boy she ever knowed. [*Comes c.*]

LIZZIE. Yep. Thet's right.

OSSIE [*looking about*]. Thar ain't no Christmas tree hyar!

LIZZIE. Wal, maybe Uncle Joshua didn't have time ter put one up yet.

OSSIE. Gee, I wish we could have stayed home. Hit's awful ter be away over Christmas.

[JOSHUA *enters R.*]

OSSIE [*sniffing air*]. Whut's that horrible smell all of a sudden?

JOSHUA [*glaring at them*]. Now whut's the Widow Hinkly been up to? [*Others have turned toward him.*] Thet woman's got more ideas on how ter git a man hitched. Whut air you? Christmas presents?

LIZZIE. I'm Lizzie Ann.

JOSHUA [*staring toward them*]. Git! Git out and leave me alone! [*LIZZIE, OSSIE and MINNIE back U C as JOSHUA comes*]