

Doin' Chickens

A Play in Three Acts

by

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Theatre Professionals:

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Cast of Characters

- Mother: In her fifties, MOTHER runs the farm from the front porch. A paraplegic confined to a wheelchair, she uses her highly-honed intuition to keep in touch with the daily affairs of the farm. Her disciplinarian approach to running the farm places her in an adversarial role among her two children and her husband. She rarely focuses her eyes on anyone, choosing instead to stare out to the horizon and beyond. She carries a short riding stick with her, and dresses simply in drab colors.
- Girl: At the age of fifteen, the GIRL can't decide if she's a revolutionary or a doormat. She is relatively pretty (though not extraordinarily so) and her eyes have an intense nature about them that most people find unnerving. She dreams of befriending the rough Appalachian terrain and building the "dream barn," a metaphorical Noah's Ark. She dresses simply, like her MOTHER, but her dress colors are more intense.
- Boy: The BOY is fourteen years old, and already tired of being a teenager. His occasional regressions into childhood suit his taste for adventure, but the responsibilities heaped upon him as heir to the farm weigh upon him considerably. He wears simple clothes and chews tobacco whenever he gets the chance (which means whenever he's out of sight from his MOTHER and FATHER). He spends a lot of time with the GIRL, his sister.
- Father: FATHER's needs are simple: If in doubt, bake a pie. He is a slim man, about forty-three, and has an obvious benevolent nature about him. He's the type of man who always carries a carrot in his pocket for the pony, and smiles and at the pigs when no one is looking.
- Nick: The youngest of the neighboring Jameson boys, NICK derives pleasure from a challenge--any challenge. He pushes himself to take advantage of any opportunity to exploit weaknesses in others. He is eighteen, dresses practically--though nicely--and speaks with very little of the heavy dialect one usually finds among the hill folk of Kentucky.
- Freddie: NICK's older brother by two years, FREDDIE wears plaid pants and a long-sleeved shirt buttoned all the way to the top--even on the hottest of days. An emotional problem has reduced this tall, muscular young man into a speechless, trudging giant. He walks stiffly and with great strength, though his direction and quality of movement are rather tentative.

Scene

The family farm in the Appalachian hills of Kentucky.

Time

The present.

ACT IScene iSETTING:

The porch and yard of a small Appalachian farmhouse, the home of MOTHER, FATHER, GIRL, and BOY. The exterior of the house is crude and unpainted; the porch boards are prone to giving splinters if not tread with care. The yard area in front of the porch is surrounded by thick briars and scrubby trees. On the porch is an upright log used as a makeshift stool. An unfinished crocheted doily has been placed on the log. There might be a step leading up to the porch, or perhaps the characters are forced to take a huge step up to the porch level. This type of homestead can be seen anywhere in rural Kentucky.

AT RISE:

Evening. In a wheelchair at the very center of the porch sits MOTHER, alone, staring out into the horizon. She leans forward and slowly tries to rise onto her legs, using the arms of her wheelchair for support. When her legs do not support her, she settles back into the chair, staring out again. After a moment she spits toward the audience.

MOTHER

(Out, to no one in particular)

Copperheads are over-runnin' the place. Not a soul around here can see one. Not alone kill it. Crawl right up on the porch and bite me in the leg. Won't even feel it till the poison creeps over me. That's the way it's gonna be.

(A little louder)

Are you gonna kill this copperhead or am I gonna hafta watch it slither over an' nail me?

(BOY enters through the porch door, breathlessly)

BOY

Where?

MOTHER

You just stay away from it!

MOTHER (continued)

(BOY walks the edge of the porch, looking for it)

It'll bite ya. Go get your father.

(BOY still looking for it. He steps off the edge of the porch)

Now what'd I tell ya? Get back on that porch and get your father like I told ya! Now!

(BOY steps back to the porch, still looking. FATHER enters from the porch door)

Now you get it. It's in the rose bushes if it's still there.

FATHER

(Steps to the edge of the porch)

Get me that hoe leanin' against the shed.

(BOY exits)

MOTHER

Should be right there. See it?

(The BOY returns quickly and hands the hoe to FATHER, who holds it before him and steps off the porch. There's a bit of motionless silence, and then quickly FATHER lashes out with the hoe, killing the snake in one chop. BOY looks on)

FATHER

He was sittin' alright. Just a little guy.

(FATHER reaches down and picks up the dead snake by the tail)

Good copperhead. Nice markings.

(BOY inspects the snake, FATHER hands it to him)

Take care of 'im while your father goes in to check on his pies.

(BOY takes the snake; FATHER leans the hoe against the house and exits into the house through the porch door. BOY looks around, sees the doily, and hides the snake under it as a joke. He sees the GIRL coming, off stage, crosses the porch quickly, and plops down on the edge. He pulls out his pocket knife and plays mumbletypeg. GIRL enters, carrying a stick casually at her side as if to hide it from MOTHER. She hops up onto the porch and passes her MOTHER, heading for the porch door)

MOTHER

Where you been trampin' around?

GIRL

I--thought I'd take a walk. Nice evenin' and all. Guess I'd better go wash up an' get started on that doily again.

(GIRL starts to enter door)

MOTHER

What ya got there?

GIRL

(Freezes)

Nothin'.

MOTHER

Give it here.

GIRL

Just a little stick.

MOTHER

Give it here!

(The GIRL turns quickly, in frustration. MOTHER does not look at her; SHE continues staring straight out)

Now!

(MOTHER holds out her hand. GIRL sadly lowers it into her hand)

Now if I don't see that doily in your hope chest by the end of the week, you're gonna wear this on your behind.

GIRL

(Picks up the doily and notices the snake. She looks quickly at the BOY, who looks away as casually as he can manage under the circumstances. She picks up the snake)

Who killed the copperhead?

(MOTHER does not answer)

Just a little one. Probably felt the fall comin'.

(Looks up at MOTHER)

Why'd ya kill 'im? Now we hafta eat 'im.

BOY

Why we gotta do that?

GIRL

'Cause we killed 'im. Can't kill somethin' an' just let it rot.

BOY

I ain't eatin' no copperhead.

GIRL

Guess he's too little ta eat.

MOTHER

Stop playin' with the copperhead and get to work. I told ya. In your hope chest by Saturd'y.

GIRL

(Laying the snake down on the porch)
You don't know what it feels like to hafta crochet with poison ivy all over
your hands.

MOTHER

Didn't stop ya from pickin' up that stick, did it?

(GIRL does not answer)

What were ya gonna do with it? For that stupid dream barn, I bet.

GIRL

It's not stupid, Momma!

MOTHER

Anybody who wants to let the livestock run amuck in the house oughta get a
one-way ticket down the river.

GIRL

(Holding up her hands again, in pain)

Ahh!

MOTHER

Proves me right.

(GIRL looks to MOTHER pleadingly)

Don't give me that pitiful look. You coulda stayed home. Worked on your
hope chest. Lookin' at me like I rubbed your hands in the poison ivy. Don't
have one eye-oo-h-ta of sympathy for you lazy lakers. Deserve what you get,
and then some. McGreevy girls are workin' on bedspreads. You're still daw-
dlin' on doilies.

(Slight pause)

An' you're not gonna con your poor ole' father into embroiderin' your pillow-
cases for ya. He's just the kinda fool to do it.

GIRL

(Tries to stifle an exclamation of pain and holds her fingers
rigidly apart)

The thread rubs across these blisters and makes 'em itch somethin' terrible.

MOTHER

Put any calamine lotion on?

GIRL

Yeah. Didn't help.

MOTHER

Itch that and it'll scab up. Make ya look real pretty with scars on your hands.

GIRL

Sometimes I just gotta itch.

MOTHER

Hafta wait 'till it dries up. Itch it an' it'll get worse.

GIRL

What if ya can't help yourself? Sometimes my hand reaches out and scratches like it's gotta mind of its own.

(Holds up the doily)

Who wants to lean their head back on a doily with poison ivy pus all over it?

MOTHER

Oh, you can wash those. You just don't wanta bother with it. Think that good ole Momma and Poppa'll run out with our hard-earned money and buy—

GIRL

It's not that, Momma—

MOTHER

Or don't ya even wanna get married? Think we raised ya goofy to see you out findin' dream barn sticks instead of talkin' to the boys. Haven't heard of ya talkin' once. Ya didn't even bake a cake for the cake walk this year.

GIRL

Momma, the last thing the boys want is cake.

MOTHER

How do ya know?

GIRL

You go to those things an' you got more guys horsin' around outside than inside. I don't know what they're after outside, but it sure ain't cake.

MOTHER

At least they're not lookin' for dream barn sticks.

GIRL

Some of 'em gonna wish they were.

MOTHER

Well if you think you're gonna him-haw' around 'till you're too old in the teeth, don't think you're gettin' a free ride 'round here. You turn eighteen and your fanny's out, husband or none.

GIRL

Can't wait.