

CRICKET COUNTY AND THE CHRISHED CHRISTMAS GIFT

by Eddie McPherson



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A one-act Christmas Comedy

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SYNOPSIS: Y'all come! Southern hospitality awaits the pretentious city cousins as they reluctantly arrive at the land of pickup trucks, aw shucks, and ample yokel yucks. From the shape of their shoddily wrapped gifts, the city cousins are sure they're getting a banjo, a washtub, and a corncob pipe, and just like that, their Christmas spirit is pfffft—gone. Entitled Mimi goes into full-on mean girl mode as she disdainfully calls out the country crew for scrimping on presents. But like Grandma says, "You can't judge a featherbed by its moth-eaten quilt." Just maybe the newspaper and twine is holding something precious, like the dirty manger and ragged swaddling cloth held the greatest gift the world has ever received. Surprises reveal that while the country folk are 100% rustic and rural, their hearts are gilded 14K gold. Slapstick shtick abounds with Grandma's new hard-of-hearing, hearse-driving beau, Glenda Mae's seemingly futile quest to speak proper around baby Elmer Jr., and Fester's dimwitted shenanigans. A holiday hoot!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 females, 6 males)

COUNTRY BUNCH:

- GRANDMA (f)The matriarch of her country family.
(119 lines)
- ELKIN (m)Oldest of Grandma's grandkids. Level-headed. *(67 lines)*
- FESTER (m).....Young and naïve. *(34 lines)*
- GLENDAMAE (f).....New mother to Elmer Junior. *(59 lines)*
- ELMER (m).....Glenda Mae's henpecked husband.
(34 lines)
- BRENDAMAE (f).....Glenda Mae's "twin" sister (though they look nothing alike). *(44 lines)*
- OTIS TREESUP (m).....Grandma's new boyfriend who is really getting up in years. *(43 lines)*

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PROPS

- Christmas gifts (details below)
- small Christmas tree
- a doll wearing a camouflage cap and wrapped in a blanket
- book
- washcloth
- toolbox
- swimming goggles
- power cord
- square piece of flat wood
- welcome rug
- jackets for the coat tree (including a camouflage coat with a hood)
- cooking pot
- two pairs of oversized rubber gloves
- bunch of turnips
- nice handbag
- wallet
- free-standing plant
- fishing pole with sprig of mistletoe tied on its hook
- handkerchief
- large rug
- letter
- axe
- Christmas garland
- a baking sheet with “censored” written on it

Christmas Gifts: Those from the city cousins may be beautifully wrapped boxes with bows. Grandma’s gift from Otis should be a plain large box with a lid holding a second slightly smaller box with a lid, a third slightly smaller box with a lid, and a final smallest box holding a brooch (four total boxes). The second, third, and fourth boxes may be colorful or gift wrapped, if the lid is wrapped separately. The following gifts from the country cousins should be wrapped with newspapers and twine, their distinctive shapes need to be obvious. One of the gifts is shaped like a banjo (use a cardboard cutout in the shape of a banjo, but tape two old-looking metal buttons to the front), one is a washtub with a pearl necklace inside, one looks like a corn cob pipe but is really a small wood carving, and one is a skillet. Elkin also needs a country present for Grandma.

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AT START: *Lights up, GRANDMA enters.*

GRANDMA: *(To audience.)* Welcome, ever'body. Come on in to the newly built Cricket County Community Center. Ain't it purdy? Speakin' of purdy, y'all might be the best-lookin' group I ever saw! This is the first Christmas we will celebrate here. Ain't that special?

ELKIN: *(Entering with a small Christmas tree in one hand and his present for GRANDMA in the other.)* Howdy, Grandma. Got the tree. *(Crosses to the counter.)*

GRANDMA: Oh, look at that tree. It's soooo purdy. Just set it right over there. And say howdy to our company that just got here.

ELKIN: *(Glances to the audience and smiles.)* Pleasure's mine.

GRANDMA: I can already smell the fresh pine needles, Elkin.

ELKIN: It's artificial. *(Sets the tree proudly on the counter.)*

GRANDMA: *(Shakes her head.)* Then the smell must be in my imagination.

ELKIN: No, it ain't. I put a pine-scented air freshener in it. See? *(Holds it up.)*

GRANDMA: You're just so clever, Elkin Taylor.

ELKIN: Grandma, you shore are in a good mood.

GRANDMA: I'm excited about our first Christmas Eve get-together in this new community gatherin' hall. Hebrews 10:25: "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near" *(NLT)*.

ELKIN: Are you sure that's the *real* reason you're excited?

GRANDMA: What you gettin' at?

ELKIN: Your boyfriend's comin' to Christmas Eve supper tonight.

GRANDMA: *(Coyly.)* But I don't have no boyfriend.

ELKIN: All of Cricket County knows you been courtin' Ottis *(Pronounced Ah-tis.)* Treesup, Grandma.

GRANDMA: I never heard of him. And his name's Otis, not Ottis.

ELKIN: Aha!

GRANDMA: *(Knows she's caught.)* Drat.

ELKIN: Grandma, don't be embarrassed. We all think it's plumb excitin' about you havin' a fella. Why you tryin' to hide it?

GRANDMA: You know good and well why, Elkin Taylor. It's a foolish notion for somebody as old as me thinkin' I can court again like I was a schoolgirl.

ELKIN: Grandma, you ain't *that* old.

GRANDMA: Honey, I can remember when the Grand Canyon was just a ditch.

ELKIN: Now, I won't hear that kind of talk.

GRANDMA: What you mean? You're old too.

ELKIN: Beg your pardon?

GRANDMA: I said you're old too, which makes me *extra* old.

ELKIN: You keep up that kind of talk, and I won't be givin' you your Christmas present. (*Throws gift on the counter.*)

GRANDMA: Honey, there ain't nothin' wrong with gettin' old. Isaiah 46:4: "Even to your old age... and gray hairs I am he ... who will sustain you."

ELKIN: (*Smiling.*) Grandma, you got a Scripture for all occasions.

GRANDMA: Besides, old age is better than the alternative. Look at *me*. I wear thick glasses, I've had two hip replacements, and I'm makin' the same noises as my coffee maker. And my memory ain't what it used to be. Also, my memory ain't what it used to be.

GLENDA MAE and ELMER enter. GLENDA MAE carries a baby wrapped in a blanket and ELMER carries two gifts.

GLENDA MAE: Yoo-hoo! Merry Christmas, ever'body.

GRANDMA: (*Rushing to GLENDA MAE.*) Lawd, how is my handsome, handsome boy?

ELMER: I'm fine.

GLENDA MAE: She's talkin' 'bout the baby, knucklehead.

ELMER: Well, before the baby was born, Grandma used to call *me* handsome.

GLENDA MAE: She called you *homely*, Elmer. *Homely*, not handsome. There's a big difference.

GRANDMA: (*Holding and looking down at the baby.*) Oh, he's lookin' more like you ever' day, Glenda Mae.

GLENDA MAE: Do you really think so, Grandma?

GRANDMA: Law, yeah. Look at that cute little nose.

ELMER: He might have her nose, but he's got *my* head.

GRANDMA: You got that right. (*Holds up the baby and we see it's wearing a camouflage cap like ELMER.*)

GLEND MAE: Merry Christmas, Cousin Elkin. (*ELKIN grunts her way.*) What's wrong with you?

ELKIN: I'm a old, wrinkled-up geezer—that's what's wrong. And don't argue with me.

GLEND MAE: Who's arguin'? You *are* old.

GRANDMA: (*Sitting down with the baby.*) Stay away from him, Glenda Mae. He's throwin' hisself a pity party over there.

ELKIN: Dagnabit! That does it. Somebody fetch me a wheelchair to sit in.

ELMER: I will. (*Heads to the door.*)

GLEND MAE: Get back here, Elmer. Cousin Elkin was just usin' what they call hyperbole (*Pronounces it hyper-bowl.*)

ELMER: Hyper-bowl?

GLEND MAE: H-y-p-e-r-b-o-l-e, hyper-bowl. It's when somebody exaggerates in their talk to make a point. For example, It's like when I tell you your socks smell like a polecat set up housekeepin' in your boots.

GRANDMA: Glenda Mae, where did you hear such a fancy word like hyper-bowl?

GLEND MAE: In this book I found. *How to Talk Right When You Was Born in the Backwoods* by Nora Jean Hackensack. I want Elmer Junior to grow up talkin' highfalutin. Y'all be surprised how many times we speak terrible English 'round here. Take this word right here, for example. (*Points to a page in her book.*) Bard. Do you know what bard is?

ELMER: Of course I do. I ain't dumb, you know.

GLEND MAE: Use it in a sentence, then.

ELMER: Let me think. Bard. (*Snaps his fingers.*) I lost my wheelbarrow last week, so I "bard" my neighbor's. (*Nose in the air.*) Bard.

GLEND MAE: Nope.

GRANDMA: (*Wiping down a table.*) What you mean, "Nope"? He said it right. Just like I "bard" them Christmas decorations over there from Flo's Taxidermy Shop.

GLEND MAE: Accordin' to this here book, bard means "a poet or a storyteller."

GRANDMA: The dickens, you say.

GLEND A MAE: Yes ma'am. The book says a man by the name of William Shakespeare was the greatest bard who ever lived.

ELMER: Who's William Shake-n-Bake?

GLEND A MAE: Elmer, Shake-n-Bake ain't nowhere close to soundin' like Shakespeare. I just told you he's a famous bard.

GRANDMA: Well, invite him to the Christmas party, and he can rattle off some poetry for us.

GLEND A MAE: (*Shaking her head.*) Grandma, Shakespeare can't come to Cricket County.

GRANDMA: Why not?

GLEND A MAE: He lives way over in England; there ain't no way he could get here by tonight.

ELKIN: For y'all's information, William Shakespeare is *deceased*.

ELMER: That's terrible. What kind of *disease* does he have?

ELKIN: He's *dead*, Elmer.

ELMER: That's a purdy bad disease.

GLEND A MAE: How do you know that, Elkin?

ELKIN: 'Cause apparently I'm *old* and wise.

GLEND A MAE: Nobody said a *thing* 'bout you bein' wise. (*Pointing to another word in her book.*) Let's try you out. Use the word "ranch" in a sentence.

ELKIN: That's too easy. Give me a tough one.

GLEND A MAE: Bet you can't do it.

ELKIN: Ranch, you say? (*Clears his throat.*) Elmer, go out to your truck and bring me that monkey ranch.

ELMER: OK. (*Heads for the door.*)

GLEND A MAE: Elmer. (*ELMER stops. She turns back to ELKIN.*) See? You used it wrong.

ELKIN: Did not. Elmer, did you know what I was talkin' about?

ELMER: When?

ELKIN: When I just asked you to get me a ranch.

ELMER: Just then?

ELKIN: Yeah, just then.

ELMER: When you asked me to get your monkey ranch?

ELKIN: Yeah.

ELMER: (*Thinks a minute.*) Wait, what was the question?

GLEND A MAE: Accordin' to the book, a ranch is "a large farm in the West where cattle and other animals are bred and raised."

ELKIN: You don't say.

GLEND MAE: I do say. It's right here in my book. I'll teach that baby boy of mine to talk right if it's the last thing I do. Come here, my little squash. Mama's gonna learn you good. Yes, she is.

ELMER: Where do we put the presents?

GRANDMA: (*Straightening a chair.*) Just set 'em right over there, Elmer.

GLEND MAE: (*To GRANDMA.*) Is your boyfriend here yet?

GRANDMA: (*Taken aback.*) My what?

GLEND MAE: I heard he's purdy for his age.

GRANDMA: I ain't talkin' to none of you.

GLEND MAE: Don't worry none, Grandma. I think me and Elmer is the only ones who knows.

FESTER: (*Enters with an axe laid across his shoulder.*) Hey, Grandma, where's that feller you've been a-courtin'?

GRANDMA: I'm done with all of y'all. I'm a-goin' to the kitchen. (*Exits to the kitchen.*)

FESTER: Just got my axe sharpened. Ain't it purdy? I'll set it right here and let it cool off. (*Sets axe against the counter or table.*) By the way, has anybody seen my ranch?

GLEND MAE: (*Hands on hips.*) Fester Taylor.

FESTER: What?

ELMER: I got one in my truck, Fester.

FESTER: No, I bard that one from you last week, remember?

GLEND MAE: (*To the baby.*) Just plug your ears, little feller.

ELMER: I'll put our Christmas presents right over here, Glenda Mae.

GLEND MAE: I shore hope they like our Christmas presents. You know them city slicker cousins of ours is hard to git for.

ELKIN: Whose names did y'all git?

ELMER: I got Cousin Pete's and Glenda Mae got Cousin Petunia's. We wrapped 'em real careful-like so they won't know what we got 'em. (*Holds up a wrapped package shaped like a corn cob pipe.*)

ELKIN: You can see clear as day what that is, Elmer.

ELMER: You can? Dern it. What about this one Glenda Mae got for Cousin Petunia? (*Holds up a gift shaped like a skillet.*)

ELKIN: Why didn't y'all put 'em in a box?

GLEND MAE: (*Rocking the baby.*) Don't pay him no mind, Elmer. Old people like Elkin can't see too good.

ELKIN: I ain't *that* old.

GLENDAMAE: Whatever you say, Rip Van *Wrinkle*. Elmer, sit 'em under the tree. (*Shouting to the kitchen.*) Grandma, you need any help in the kitchen?

GRANDMA: (*Off-stage.*) I ain't talkin' to y'all.

GLENDAMAE: (*Shouting.*) Grandma, we was just kiddin' around with you. We think it's great for you to have a boyfriend at your—I mean, with you being so old, and—I mean, somebody as wrinkled as... (*Pause.*) I'm goin' to just sit here and be quiet.

BRENDAMAE: (*Enters with a wrapped present shaped like a banjo.*) Howdy, ever'body. Oh, look at this place, will you? Purdy, purdy, purdy. And how is your beautiful little man, Glenda Mae?

ELMER: I'm fine.

GLENDAMAE: She's talkin' about the baby, knucklehead.

BRENDAMAE: No, I wasn't. I was talkin' 'bout Elmer.

ELMER: (*Nose in the air.*) See?

ELKIN: (*Seeing the shape of BRENDAMAE'S gift.*) Brenda Mae, whose name did you draw for Christmas? I hope it was mine. My banjer is just about wore out.

BRENDAMAE: It ain't yours. I drew Cousin Oswald's name.

GLENDAMAE: I don't think Cousin Oswald plays the banjer.

BRENDAMAE: What makes y'all think this is a banjer?

FESTER: Let me show you. (*Takes it and holds it against him, pretending to strum it, making the picking sound with his mouth.*) Bew, bew, bew, bew, bew, bew, bew. I'd like to sing a little love song I wrote called, "She Went to the Bathroom and She Never Came Back."

BRENDAMAE: (*Grabbing the gift.*) Y'all think y'all know so much. Ain't y'all ever heard the sayin' "You can't judge a book by its cover"? Give me that. I happen to know Cousin Oswald real good, and I think he will love his present. (*FESTER takes a toolbox off a chair, crosses, and stoops behind the counter.*)

GLENDAMAE: Cousin Petunia drew my name this year. Lawd, that girl don't know how to buy presents. Last year she got me a dress with little shiny sparkly things all over it.

BRENDAMAE: You didn't like it? She paid lots of money for that there dress.

GLEND MAE: I hinted and hinted for months that I wanted new fishin' lures, and she comes traipsin' in with that frilly, girly dress. So this year I extra hinted. I says, "I probably won't get to fish this year," and she asked, "Why?" and I said, "'Cause I ain't got no fishin' lures to fish with."

SFX: power saw.

ELKIN: Fester! *(The saw noise stops. FESTER stands up from behind the counter wearing swimming goggles.)* Yeah?

ELKIN: What in Sam Hill are you doin' back there?

FESTER: Cuttin' a hole in the floor with my new power saw.

ELKIN: *(Shocked.)* Why you cuttin' a hole in the floor with a power saw?

FESTER: 'Cause I don't want to ruin my axe.

ELKIN: *(At wits' end.)* But why cut a hole?

FESTER: Checkin' for rats. So, if you'll excuse me... *(Starts to duck.)*

ELKIN: Fester, you can't put a hole in the middle of the floor like that.

ELMER: Don't worry, Elkin. When he's done cuttin' the hole, we'll move it closer to the wall.

FESTER: Sounds good. *(He bends down and the saw sound starts up again. ELKIN unplugs the saw.)*

ELKIN: Fester!

FESTER: *(Sawing stops and he stands.)* Yeah?

ELKIN: Do you know how dangerous that is?

FESTER: Don't worry, I'm wearin' my goggles.

GLEND MAE: You mean goggles. *(Rolls her eyes.)* Close your delicate ears, my little baby.

FESTER: *(To GLEND MAE.)* Goggles, goggles; tomaters, tamales.

ELKIN: *(As FESTER plugs the cord back in.)* Fester, I meant the hole could be dangerous.

FESTER: It can't be dangerous, 'cause it ain't finished yet. *(He bends down, and we hear the saw for one quick second, then it stops and he pops up again.)* Now it's finished. *(He looks down into the hole.)* I don't see no rats. Mission accomplished. *(Holds up a square piece of wood.)*

BRENDA MAE: Fester, you better cover that hole, or Grandma will skin you alive.

GLENDMAE MAE: This here community hall is brand-spankin' new.

GRANDMA: *(Sticks her head in from the kitchen.)* What's that noise in here? *(ALL grow quiet and look nervously over at GRANDMA.)*

ELKIN: Nothin', Grandma. We was just talkin'.

GRANDMA: I thought I heard a power saw.

GLENDMAE MAE: No, ma'am, that was just Fester doin' his power saw imitation.

BRENDA MAE: Fester can sound just like a power saw. Do it for Grandma, Fester. *(FESTER nervously opens his mouth and we hear the power saw sound again. He closes his mouth and it stops.)*

GRANDMA: That's real good, Fester. Now, hush up before you wake up Elmer Junior. I need y'all to help me get ready for those city cousins of yours.

BRENDA MAE: Don't you mean get ready for your *boyfriend*?

GRANDMA: I ain't got no boyfriend.

BRENDA MAE: Shore you do.

GRANDMA: Don't neither.

BRENDA MAE: Do too.

GRANDMA: Do *not*.

BRENDA MAE: What's his name?

GRANDMA: Otis.

GLENDMAE MAE and BRENDA MAE: Aha!

GRANDMA: *(Embarrassed.)* I don't like none of y'all no more. *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

GLENDMAE MAE: Elmer, go to the truck and get the diaper bag, sugar plum.

ELMER: Anything for you, love dove. *(Exits to outside.)*

ELKIN: Fester, I'll keep Grandma in the kitchen 'til you get that hole fixed. Now, hurry up and git it done! *(Exits to the kitchen.)*

GLENDMAE MAE: Come on, Brenda Mae, help me change the baby in the back room.

BRENDA MAE: Why me, Glenda Mae?

GLENDMAE MAE: 'Cause you have *got* to learn how to change his diaper. Last time you covered the wrong end.

BRENDA MAE: OK, but I don't think that's in my aunt contract.

GLEND MAE and BRENDA MAE exit to the back room. FESTER walks around the room, trying to find a way to cover the hole. He finally picks up the welcome rug from the front door and crosses behind the counter and lays the rug down over the 'hole'.

GRANDMA: *(From Off-stage.)* Fester?

Panicked, FESTER desperately looks around and then spots a camouflage coat with a hood hanging on the coat rack next to the door. He runs to it, takes the coat off the rack, slips his arms into it, puts on the hood, and buries his face in the coatrack, blending in with the other coats on the rack. GRANDMA enters carrying a pot.

GRANDMA: Fester Taylor, I need you to throw these scraps out for me. *(ELKIN runs in and grabs the pot.)*

ELKIN: I'll do it, Grandma.

GRANDMA: Well, hurry up. I need that pot for the stew I'm makin'. *(She returns to the kitchen. ELKIN looks around and whispers.)*

ELKIN: Fester?

FESTER: *(Not moving from his spot.)* By the coat rack.

ELKIN: Where?

FESTER: Over here. I'm stuck. *(ELKIN crosses to him and spins FESTER around.)*

ELKIN: Fester, you're goin' to be the death of me. Did you cover that there hole?

FESTER: Yep, I covered it real good, Cousin Elkin.

ELKIN: Good, then take out these scraps. Grandma needs the pot.

FESTER: OK.

FESTER exits out the front door as ELKIN turns and exits to the kitchen. After a moment OSWALD enters carrying a gift. He's followed by MIMI, PETUNIA, and PETE, who all wear nice coats and carry beautifully wrapped gifts. They remove their coats as they speak.

OSWALD: Hello? Anybody home?

MIMI: *(Knocking PETE out of her way.)* Move it! Let me sit down. My feet are killing me!

PETUNIA: Mimi, why are your feet hurting? We've been sitting for the last six hours.

PETE: Yeah, it's not your feet that should be aching.

MIMI: Pete, stop being the grey, boring person that you are.

OSWALD: (*Shouting to the room.*) Hello?

ELKIN: (*He steps just inside the room wearing oversized rubber gloves, holding his hands up like a surgeon.*) Howdy, y'all. Shore is good to see you.

OSWALD: Is something wrong, Elkin?

ELKIN: No, just helpin' Grandma stuff a possum. Make yourselves at home. (*He disappears again.*)

PETE: (*Looking around.*) Nice community center they have here.

MIMI: Why is everything in Cricket County made of wood? Haven't they heard of marble out here in the sticks?

PETUNIA: Come on, everyone. Let's put our gifts over here near the tree.

BRENDA MAE: (*She stands just inside the back room door wearing rubber gloves.*) Hey, y'all. Be right with you.

PETUNIA: Is everything all right, Glenda Mae?

BRENDA MAE: I'm Brenda Mae. Yeah, I'm just helpin' Glenda Mae change Elmer Jr.'s diaper. Make yourselves at home. (*She disappears.*)

PETUNIA: (*As she places each beautifully wrapped gift under the Christmas tree.*) Let's see now. Mimi, you got Fester's name. I got Glenda Mae's name, Oswald got Elmer's, and Pete got Elkin's. Good, we didn't forget anyone.

MIMI: Do you see *my* gift over there?

OSWALD: Mimi, behave yourself.

MIMI: What? I just want to see how big it is. After all, isn't Christmas about who gets the biggest gift?

OSWALD, PETUNIA and PETE: (*Together.*) No.

OSWALD: You know better than that.

MIMI: (*Crossing to the tree.*) I know nothing of the kind. Oh, here's mine. (*She picks it up and, because of how it's wrapped, it's clear to see it's a washtub.*) Wait a moment. Is this what I think it is?

PETE: (*Laughing.*) Just what you always wanted, Mimi.

MIMI: Are you telling me that I gave up a night at the ballet for this? Oswald, take me home.

PETUNIA: Mimi, every year you come out here hoping to receive some expensive gift from our rich country cousins, and every year you *never* get what you expect.

MIMI: Boo *you*, just not *true*.

OSWALD: I think the reason Mimi secretly enjoys coming out here every year is because she's starting to warm up to our dear country cousins.

MIMI: Bite your tongue. (*PETUNIA starts to speak.*) And *yours*, too. The day that our late rich Uncle Zack—

OSWALD: *Zeke.*

MIMI: Whatever—left these hillbilly cousins all his millions, was the day my soul started to die one sad day at a time.

PETUNIA: (*Shaking her head.*) Mimi, you're so dramatic.

MIMI: (*Putting down the tub.*) Don't you remember who was planning to take me to see *The Nutcracker* ballet tonight? Jordan Van Horn.

PETE: Who's Jordan Van Horn?

MIMI: Only the most handsome and richest eligible bachelor in the city. And to think I gave up a night with my possible future husband for *this*. (*Refers to the tub.*) I feel a migraine coming on. (*Slams the tub on the floor.*)

OSWALD: Pete, do you see my gift over there?

PETE: (*Looks.*) Let's see... Oh, here it is. (*Picks up the gift shaped like a banjo.*)

OSWALD: Let me see. (*He takes the gift but is disappointed.*) What am I supposed to do with this?

PETE: You pluck it, of course. (*Laughs.*) Out here you have a choice: pluck a banjo or pluck a chicken. (*PETE, PETUNIA, and MIMI laugh.*)

OSWALD: (*Unenthusiastically.*) Ha, ha. You guys are so funny I forgot to laugh.

PETUNIA: While we're at it, let me see *my* gift. (*Looks through the gifts.*) Here it is. (*She picks up the gift shaped like a skillet.*) Wait a minute.

MIMI: Oh good, Petunia. (*Her best country accent.*) You can fry us up some possum innards when we get back home.

PETUNIA: (*Disappointed.*) I don't know how to use one of these things.

OSWALD: *(Laughing.)* Hey, let's see what Pete got over here under the tree. *(OSWALD picks up a gift shaped like a corncob pipe.)* Here you go, sir.

PETE: But I don't smoke.

OSWALD: Just clamp it between your teeth, and you will look so distinguished. *(ALL but PETE laugh.)*

PETE: At least I didn't get a washtub. *(They laugh as ELKIN and GRANDMA enter from the kitchen. The CITY BUNCH doesn't see them.)*

OSWALD: *(Pretending to pick the banjo and speaking with a hillbilly accent.)* Fer mah next number, I'm a-goin' to sing the hit song called, "Our Relationship Was a Failure, but Our Breakup Ain't Workin' Out Neither."

PETE: *(Pretending to smoke the corncob pipe and acting hillbilly.)* Let me ponder that there song for a second. Don't I look smart holding up my pipe like this? *(Speaking proper now.)* Four score and seven years ago... *(They laugh.)*

GRANDMA: *(Laughing.)* What y'all young'uns laughin' at over there?

The CITY BUNCH freeze in their spots, staring wide-eyed out to the audience.

OSWALD: *(Silly, embarrassed grin.)* Uh, hello, Grandma Taylor. Merry Christmas.

PETE: *(Also silly grin.)* We were just hanging around.

ELKIN: Don't try and hide it; I know what y'all was doin'.

PETUNIA: *(Nervous.)* Y-You do?

ELKIN: Y'all tryin' to guess what all we got y'all for Christmas, ain't you? Let me just say this: looks can be deceivin'. *(He smiles big.)*

OSWALD: Really?

ELKIN: For example, *(Takes the banjo-looking gift.)* By the look of this here present, you might think it's a snow tire or a cute little speckled pup.

GRANDMA: Right, but just so y'all know, you can't judge a feather bed by its moth-eaten quilt. Now y'all just make y'allselfs comfortable while we finish makin' Christmas Eve supper. *(There's a knock at the front door.)*

ELKIN: I'll get it. *(Heads to the door.)*

GRANDMA: Wait a minute, Elkin. Take your city cousins to the kitchen for me.

ELKIN: Oh, I see. You think that might be your—

GRANDMA: Hush up!

MIMI: Might be her what?

GRANDMA: None of your beeswax. Now, go on to the kitchen like I done told ya. *(She ushers them all toward the kitchen.)*

ELKIN: *(Laughing at her shyness.)* OK, OK, we're a-goin'. You don't have to be so pushy!

GRANDMA: Yes, I do. Now, git!

ALL exit to the kitchen. GRANDMA straightens her dress and heads to the door. GLENDA MAE comes out of the back room.

GLENDA MAE: Grandma, I up and left Elmer Junior's diapers at home. Do you have any newspapers I can borrow?

GRANDMA: There some on the top shelf in there. Git!

GLENDA MAE: *(Without hesitation.)* Yes'm. *(She runs back into the back room. GRANDMA turns and opens the door. There stands OTIS, GRANDMA's very country-looking boyfriend.)*

GRANDMA: Well, look at this. What a surprise!

OTIS: Surprise? But I *told* you I was a-comin', Imogene.

GRANDMA: *(Pretending.)* I thought you meant you was comin' for New Year's, not Christmas.

OTIS: Oh. *(He turns to leave. GRANDMA quickly grabs his elbow.)*

GRANDMA: But since you're here, you might as well come in and take a load off.

OTIS: Here. I brung these fer ya. *(He hands her a bouquet of turnips.)*

GRANDMA: *(As though it were a beautiful bouquet of flowers.)* Fresh turnips in the dead of winter! How did you ever manage?

OTIS: Grew 'em in my greenhouse. I remember how much you told me you liked turnips.

GRANDMA: I think I said *tulips*, but these will do just fine.

OTIS: What?

GRANDMA: These are *fine*.

OTIS: *(Pats his stomach.)* We can dine?

GRANDMA: *Fine*, Otis. I said *fine*, not dine. *(Heads to a small table.)*
I think I'll set 'em right over here. Ain't they the purdyest things?

OTIS: What?

GRANDMA: (*Shouting.*) Purdy!

OTIS: Why, much obliged. (*Licks his hand and slicks his hair back.*) I try my best. (*Looks GRANDMA's way.*) And speakin' of purdy

GRANDMA: Oh, Otis, you old flirt.

OTIS: That's the purdiest Christmas tree I seen all year.

GRANDMA: (*Smile disappears, speaking to herself.*) Looks like this man might be a waste of a perfectly good girdle.

OTIS: I'm nervous about meetin' your family for the first time.

GRANDMA: (*Shouting.*) Well, don't be. They just good old down-to-earth people.

MIMI: (*Rushing in from the kitchen.*) I do declare I have misplaced my fancy and expensive handbag, for which I paid lots of money. Hark! I see it now. I'm soooo relieved. (*She grabs it and heads back to the kitchen. Stops, glances back at OTIS and GRANDMA, pulls her wallet out of her purse, and checks to see if her cash is still there. Smiling, she exits to the kitchen.*)

GRANDMA: Except for that one. She's the black sheep.

OTIS: What?

GRANDMA: Black sheep.

OTIS: Naw, I don't need to go back to sleep. I had a nap early on.

GRANDMA: Sheep, not slee— (*To herself.*) Lawd, I should have got you a hearin' aid for Christmas. (*To OTIS.*) Sit down, sit down! (*OSWALD, PETUNIA and PETE peep through the kitchen door, their heads stacked on top of each other.*)

OTIS: Well, all right, don't mind if I— (*He spots the CITY BUNCH. They panic and disappear back inside the kitchen. OTIS shrugs this off and sits. He pats the chair seat beside him.*) Come sit beside me... honey.

GRANDMA: (*Beyond flattered and not very good at not letting it show.*) Oh, Otis Treesup, you have not been courtin' me long enough to call me *honey*.

OTIS: What I meant to say was, come sit beside me ... (*Leans in.*) sweetcakes. (*GRANDMA turns her head away and giggles like a schoolgirl.*) Imogene, you're finer than a new set of truck tires.

GRANDMA: Mr. Treesup, the things you say. (*FESTER and ELMER enter quickly through the front door. FESTER still holds the pot. They see the couple and freeze. ELMER and FESTER slowly tiptoe backward, as though they are heading back outside.*) Don't fret none. Y'all can come on in. (*Without a word, FESTER and ELMER slowly tiptoe forward until they're inside the room.*) Boys, I'd like for y'all to meet Otis Treesup. He's my date for the night. And don't be makin' fun of your grandma for courtin' at my age.

FESTER: Nice to meet you, Mr. Tree Sap.

GRANDMA: Treesup, Fester. His last name is Treesup.

FESTER: Ain't that what I said?

ELMER: We hope we ain't interruptin', Grandma. I mean, he wasn't about to kiss you or nothin', was he?

GRANDMA: Elmer Crick, what a thing to say. Of course he wasn't. (*Beat, to OTIS.*) Was you?

OTIS: No ma'am.

GRANDMA: Drat. (*ELKIN slips in from the kitchen and hides behind a plant. GLENDA MAE and BRENDA MAE sneak in from the back room and stand on either side of the hole FESTER cut and duck down behind the counter, peeping over.*)

FESTER: We'll leave you two love buds alone.

GRANDMA: You mean *birds*, Fester.

OTIS: What?

GRANDMA: (*Shouts.*) Bird!

OTIS: I ain't no *nerd*, I'm just shy.

GRANDMA: (*To FESTER, referring to the others who just snuck in.*) And tell the rest of your family to do the same.

BRENDA MAE: (*Stepping out from her hiding place.*) Grandma, how did you see us?

GRANDMA: Grandmas see ever'thing.

ELKIN: Come on, ever'body, let's leave 'em be. (*Everyone exits.*)

OTIS: (*As BRENDA MAE starts to exit.*) Excuse me, young'un?

BRENDA MAE: Yes sir?

OTIS: Would you be a dear and go out to my hearse and bring in your grandma's Christmas present I got her?

BRENDA MAE: Your *what*?

OTIS: My Christmas present.

GRANDMA: I don't think that was the *what* she was whatin' about. Did you say your *hearse*?

OTIS: Yeah, I drive a hearse.

GRANDMA: Oh. *(Beat.)* Why?

OTIS: For one, it's reliable transportation.

GRANDMA: And two?

OTIS: It's a chick magnet. Women all over Cricket County are just dyin' to ride in that thing.

BRENDA MAE: *(Shouting toward the back room.)* Glenda Mae?
(GLENDA MAE enters with the baby.)

GLENDA MAE: Yeah, Brenda Mae?

BRENDA MAE: You want to go outside with me to fetch Grandma's Christmas present?

GLENDA MAE: OK. Let me put the baby down.

GRANDMA: Brenda Mae, you scared 'cause there's a hearse out there, ain't you?

GLENDA MAE: Hearse? No thank you. *(Exits quickly to the back room.)*

OTIS: Don't fret none. It's just a long, black car that hauls corpses.

BRENDA MAE: You're right, I reckon. Just a automobile. *(Putting on her coat.)*

OTIS: While you're out there, can you make sure Mr. Brewster didn't get knocked about durin' the trip over here?

BRENDA MAE: Yes sir. *(Exits.)*

OTIS: *(To GRANDMA.)* Now, where was we?

BRENDA MAE: *(Runs back in, slams the door, and throws herself up against it.)* Make sure Mr. *who* didn't do *what* on the way *where*?

GRANDMA: I swear, Brenda Mae Taylor, if you don't give us some privacy—

OTIS: *(Laughs.)* I was just kiddin', child.

BRENDA MAE: You shore?

OTIS: Of course I'm shore.

BRENDA MAE: That's a relief. *(Exits.)*

OTIS: *(To GRANDMA.)* I made shore Mr. Brewster was tied in real good.

GRANDMA: Mr. Treesup, you just sit real still-like. *(Calling.)* Oh, Feeees-teeeer.

OTIS: Like this? *(He sits up straight, big eyes, staring straight out, like a mannequin.)*

On GRANDMA'S cue, FESTER enters with a sprig of mistletoe tied to the end of a fishing line. He sneaks over behind OTIS, unseen by the old man, and carefully holds the sprig over OTIS's head.

GRANDMA: *(To OTIS.)* You can relax now. *(He does.)* I love ever'thing about Christmas. The snow, the Christmas tree, the Nativity story, the mistletoe....

OTIS: *(Takes his glasses off and begins wiping them with a handkerchief.)* Lawd, I don't think I've saw mistletoe in years.

GRANDMA: Well, sometimes it takes lookin' up to notice things.

OTIS: *(Looking down at his glasses.)* Yeah, I know what you mean.

GRANDMA: Usually mistletoe hangs up high.

OTIS: Yep, they shore enough do.

GRANDMA: Do you like them old songs, like "Up, Up and Away"? *(OTIS continues looking down, cleaning his glasses.)* "When the Roll Is Called up Yonder?" How about "Love Lift Us Up"? Look up, old man. Look up before I pop my corset!

OTIS: Oh, OK. *(He looks directly up at the mistletoe but doesn't see it without his glasses.)* Yeah, it shore is nice to look up sometimes.

GRANDMA: *(Back to him, flirty.)* What you see up there?

OTIS: I can't see a thing without my glasses. *(GRANDMA sighs.)*

PETUNIA: *(Sticking her head in.)* Grandma Taylor?

GRANDMA: *(Deflated.)* Yeah?

PETUNIA: We have everything cooking. Can we come back in now?

GRANDMA: Go on, Fester. Yeah, you can come in.

As PETUNIA, OSWALD, PETE and MIMI re-enter and carry on their conversation, the following takes place behind the counter: FESTER reels in the mistletoe and heads back to the back room. He gets to the hole in the floor and starts to fall in. He throws the fishing pole into the air and grabs on to the counter with both hands, holding on for dear life. He dares not yell or GRANDMA will know about the hole. With all his might, he pulls himself up, just barely missing dropping down into the hole. He stands beside the hole and looks down into it. He scratches his head. Apparently he lost the rug down in the hole. He

looks around and notices another large rug next to the door leading into the kitchen. He crosses over to get it.

PETUNIA: I made some rolls to go with dinner.

GRANDMA: We don't eat dinner.

PETUNIA: I beg your—

GRANDMA: We eat supper 'round these parts.

OSWALD: Oh, well, supper is simmering nice and slow.

GRANDMA: (*Grumpy, looks at OTIS.*) Same here.

MIMI: I planned to open some caviar, but I couldn't find any.

GRANDMA: And you never will. Not while I'm still breathin'.

MIMI: Why not?

GRANDMA: 'Cause cavi-ear don't go with possum innards, that's why.

MIMI: (*Making a face.*) Good point.

OTIS: Talkin' 'bout possum innards done made me hungry. Is there a place I can freshen up before supper?

GRANDMA: (*Still defeated, points to the back room.*) Yeah, back there.

OTIS crosses back behind the counter as the CITY BUNCH approach GRANDMA and carry on a conversation. When OTIS reaches the hole, his hands go up into the air and he falls into the hole with only a whimper. This is unseen by everyone. FESTER, also not a witness to this, pulls the new rug over behind the counter and covers the hole. He wipes his forehead with the back of his hand, relieved, thinking he was able to cover it without incident. He retrieves his fishing pole, props it against a chair and exits to the back room.

MIMI: (*When MIMI says her line, make sure the laughter has died down from the above goings-on.*) We wanted to speak to you about these gifts your hillbilly family planned to give us.

OSWALD: Mimi, stop it.

GRANDMA: What about 'em?

PETE: Mimi, don't. (*MIMI starts to speak.*) Mimi. (*MIMI starts to speak again.*) Mimi! (*MIMI rolls her eyes.*)

PETUNIA: Mimi was just going to say how humble we are to be receiving gifts from our beloved family with whom we don't get to spend enough time.

GRANDMA: *(To MIMI.)* I can see you're just dyin' to see what we got you this year. Girl, are you ever goin' to be surprised!

MIMI: Don't count on it.

OSWALD: *(Through his teeth.)* Mimi, stop it.

MIMI: Stop saying "Mimi" every time I start to speak my mind. It's time *this* Mimi speaks her mind.

PETUNIA: No, it's not.

MIMI: Yes it is.

OSWALD and PETE: *(Together.)* No, it's not.

MIMI: Yes, it *is*.

GRANDMA: What in the world are you ramblin' bout, child?

MIMI: I want the whole family in here to hear this.

OSWALD: No, you don't.

MIMI: Yes, I do. *(Shouting.)* Everyone! Come in here, please. I have a very important announcement to make.

GLENDIA MAE: *(Re-enters with the baby.)* Did somebody call me?

BRENDA MAE: *(Enters carrying in a big box from outside.)* Could somebody please give me a hand? *(Everyone applauds.)* That wasn't funny a-tall.

GRANDMA: *(Rushing to BRENDA MAE.)* Oh, is that my Christmas present from Otis?

BRENDA MAE: Shore enough is. Whew! I brung it all the way in from the hearse.

OSWALD: What did you say?

BRENDA MAE: I brung it all the way in.

OSWALD: After that.

BRENDA MAE: From the.

OSWALD: *(Rolls his eyes.)* After *that*.

GRANDMA: *Hearse!* She said she brung it all the way from the hearse. *(Glaring at the gift.)* I can't wait to see what it is.

BRENDA MAE: Grandma, it ain't Christmas yet.

GRANDMA: I reckon it almost is. *(She takes the top off the first box and pulls a smaller wrapped box out.)* Look at this! Ain't that so purdy and shiny?

BRENDA MAE: Grandma, I don't think that's the present.

GRANDMA: Oh. *(She removes the top of the next box and pulls a smaller box out.)* Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle! Would you look at this? I'll set it on the mantle at home.



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