

HATCHET HOLLER

by Dan Neidermyer



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A Hillbilly Comedy in Two Acts

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SYNOPSIS: Hatchet Holler's so far back in the hills nobody knows it's there 'cept the Rooter and the Huyett clans. They've treed 'coons in Hatchet Holler since Daniel Boone first explored these parts. 'Nd that's been a long, long, time. They've lived there without so much as one person ever knowin' about 'em... until late last night! While hiding in the weeds with some critters... Percy Rooter vanished! But nobody really believes it when the young-uns tell 'em. No matter how many times these Rooter kids swear they're tellin' the honest-to-goodness truth! YEP! Hatchet Holler's been discovered and everybody out there wants somethin'! Hatchet Holler is an action-packed hillbilly production chockful of belly-laughing fun. Minimum junk on a bare stage enhanced with more junk and most anything passin' for costumes, includin' bare feet, 'cause the Rooters 'nd the Huyetts never heard of fashion. This comedy has the zaniest hillbilly and city slicker characters ever to appear on the same stage! Bare stage with props.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 males, 11 females)

THE ROOTER CLAN:

- ELMER (m).....Betsy-totin' Pa, not willin' ta let change come to Hatchet Holler 'nd miffed real bad at the Huyett clan, all of 'em. *(188 lines)*
- SAMANTHAMAE (f).....A saint in rags, workin' her fingers to the bone, 'nd mother already has thirteen with one more or less on the way. *(85 lines)*
- SUNFLOWER (f).....Just like her name implies, and the oldest of thirteen. *(18 lines)*
- MOLLIE (f).....The second of thirteen. *(25 lines)*
- MILLIE (f).....The third of thirteen. *(22 lines)*

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- PERCY (m)The only boy in the Rooter clan, 'nd of late, he's been acting mighty strange. (35 lines)
- SCHMOO (f).....One-third of the triplets, though they don't really look alike 'cause they're fraternal triplets. (39 lines)
- SCHMEE (f).....Another third of the triplets. (38 lines)
- SCHMICK (f).....The final third. (23 lines)
- LULU (f).....Currently, the littlest Rooter. (6 lines)

THE HUYETT CLAN:

- WOLF (m).....A handsome prince in rags. Also, the oldest of the Huyett kids. (21 lines)
- CHOAT (m).....So handsome 'nd so muscular, it simply takes yer breath away, or at least those who lay eyes on him. (17 lines)

OUTSIDERS:

- CRAZY SALLY (f)Ain't been right fer quite some time. (13 lines)
- MIRANDA (f).....A representative of the Darke County Board of Education. (40 lines)
- SARAH LYNN (f).....Another representative of the Darke County Board of Education. (16 lines)
- FRANKIE (m).....A New York City small-time gangster. (46 lines)
- DECKO (m).....Frankie's not-too-bright underling. (41 lines)
- LAWMAN (m).....Darke County's sheriff. (7 lines)
- THE ALIEN (m)nuf sed. (4 lines)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: So dark we don't know where it is.

SCENE 2: The backyard of the Rooter clan's ramshackle home.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: The backyard of the Rooter clan's ramshackle home.

SCENE 2: Somewhere deep in the holler between the Rooter's ramshackle home and the Huyett swamp.

SCENE 3: The backyard of the Rooter clan's ramshackle home.

THE PLACE

Hatchet Holler, so far back in the hills no one knows it even exists 'cept the two clans that have lived thar fer soon five generations.

THE TIME

Mid-August, this year.

SET

In one word, JUNK. Fill yer bare stage with whatever's handy: barrels, buckets, ladders, firewood, crates, a dog house, hammocks, anything that adds to the impression: "This place ain't been cleaned up in five generations!" And it's not about to be either.

COSTUMES

Most anything will do 'cause the Rooter 'nd the Huyett clans ain't heard of fashion yet. 'Nd it wouldn't matter if they did. They like their rags 'nd feed bags. Some hillbilly ideas; pigtails, tattered dresses, patched overalls, ragged shirts, soiled blue jeans, faded shirts, disheveled hair, plaid trousers, grungy shorts, unwashed skirts, grimy hats, and stained aprons . . . shoeless, shoeless, shoeless!

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PROPS

- Betsy BB gun (Pa)
- Old, very old handkerchief (Pa)
- A basket of dandelions (dried flowers or anything to look like weeds) (Sunflower)
- Several notes (Crazy Sally)
- Flashlight (Mollie)
- Flashlight (Millie)
- Flashlight (Percy)
- Notepad and pencil (Miranda)
- Rope (Schmick)

NOTES ON CHARACTERS

From time to time, several characters sing. They sing only a few phrases, usually quite loud, most often off pitch. The songs can be "made up" and most certainly do not call for a "singing voice" to get the job done!

Throughout the script, various noises are heard. These noises could be either live or pre-recorded from sound effects tapes. Or experiment and create your own!

Also, during Act Two, Scene 2, several characters utilize (supposedly) karate and alligator wrestling. This small bit of stage business is meant to hilariously entertain and should be directed as such. No special karate techniques or wrestling skills are needed by either the actors or the director. In fact, this action should be directed with laughter and excitement in mind rather than any display of pugilistic skill or talent. Turn this scene into great fun!

Hillbillies are backward. This is obvious. But the hillbillies in the rugged backwoods of Hatchet Holler are hilariously odd. This is why we like them. With this in mind, have heaps of fun creatin' each and every role!

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. The sounds of bullfrogs, crickets, and other night creatures of the mountain's forest eerily fill the darkness for several moments. Then, the sound of an exaggerated kiss. Dim light spills onto a corner of the stage, almost as if for a few moments the clouds have moved on. The dim light reveals SUNFLOWER ROOTER and WOLF HUYETT, every inch mountain hillbilly teenagers, standing, staring into each other's eyes. WOLF, in his ragged shirt and torn pants, thrift store rejects, holds SUNFLOWER'S hand. From offstage, near the two teenagers: the sound of several steps and the breaking of twigs, startling SUNFLOWER.*

SUNFLOWER: Someone's comin'!

WOLF: *(Dropping SUNFLOWER'S hand.)* Time to get home anyways.

Pap goes around back this time of night now these days, lookin' fer possums.

SUNFLOWER: Wh . . .

WOLF: Here of late, maw's just-baked pies have been snitched from off'n the back porch at night. Pap thinks it's possums.

SUNFLOWER: Or Crazy Sally.

WOLF: Why her?

SUNFLOWER: Last week, ma caught her trampin' around in our rhubarb patch, pulling up our rhubarb. Then, she'd just stand there lookin' at it real strange like. A second later, she's be stickilit in her ears.

WOLF: Poor thing. This holler's no place for Crazy Sally.

SUNFLOWER: *(Hurriedly, looking off in the direction of the sound of steps and breaking twigs.)* I gotta go now.

WOLF: Just one more kiss, Sunflower.

SUNFLOWER: No, Wolf. If'en we get caught, even just bein' seen near each other, I'll get a lickin' so hard from Pa won't be able to sit down til next winter.

WOLF: Same here.

SUNFLOWER: Say, where'd you ever get da name "Wolf"?

WOLF: (With pride.) Mom named all of us Huyett kids. Named us for the first thing she saw right after we each was born.

SUNFLOWER: Yar mom saw a wolf in da swamp??!!

WOLF: Yeah, my pap!

From offstage, a bit closer: several more steps, trying to be secret about their movement, though still heard and frightening SUNFLOWER.

SUNFLOWER: We's bein' watched!

WOLF: Happenin' more often, here of late.

SUNFLOWER: (Exiting.) I gotta go.

WOLF: (Exiting.) Tomorrow night?

SUNFLOWER: (A stage whisper.) If'en I'm still alive. (And she's gone.)

WOLF: (A stage whisper.) Same here. (And he's gone.)

The moon is suddenly captured again. The stage goes dark. The sound of bullfrogs and crickets fill the darkness again.

Suddenly, a flashlight is clicked on.

MOLLIE: (Holding the flashlight under her chin, illuminating part of her face.) Shucks, Percy, we been traipsin' through this mountain all night fer nuthin'.

Another flashlight clicks on.

PERCY: (Holding his flashlight under his chin.) Ssh-hhhh. Ya ain't waited half long enuf.

Another flashlight clicks on.

MILLIE: (Holding her flashlight under her chin.) How much waitin' longer's enuf?

PERCY: Til we see 'em.

MOLLIE: Ya made all this up, Percy.

PERCY: A stick of gum says I didn't!

MILLIE: Nah, ya probly already chewed it once today.

PERCY: Ya'll see. Both of ya. It'll skeer ya right outta yer longjohns.

MOLLIE: If'en it doesn't show up, yer word's not worth hearin' ever again.

PERCY: Just wait. Ya'll see.

Unexpectedly, somewhere out in the dark, a whirring noise.

MILLIE: (*Frightened.*) What wuz that?!

PERCY: Ssh-hhhh.

Again, the whirring noise in the dark, a bit closer, a bit louder.

PERCY: (*Stage whisper.*) It's comin'. Lights out!

All flashlights click off at once. More whirring, now even closer, even louder.

MOLLIE: (*Stage whisper.*) What if'en it gets us?

PERCY: (*Stage whisper.*) Ya'll be its bedtime snack right before it hunkers down ta da swamp 'nd swallers fifteen lizards. Now shet yer tater trap.

The whirring noise becomes very loud, very huge, and very close.

MOLLIE and MILLIE scream bloody murder scaring off whatever it was.

The noise stops.

PERCY: (*Clicking on his flashlight.*) Ya both skeered it away!

MOLLIE: (*Clicking on her flashlight.*) Who wants to be monster meat?

MILLIE: (*Clicking on her flashlight.*) Percy! What is "it"?

PERCY: I told ya both befer. It ain't human, 'nd it's not animal.

MOLLIE: Wut's left?

PERCY: (*Pointing his flashlight skyward.*) Out thar.

MILLIE: Meanin'?

PERCY: (*Spooky-like.*) We are not alone . . .

MOLLIE: (*Looking around.*) Thought we skeered it away.

PERCY: No, we ARE alone here. (*Points flashlight toward audience.*)

We are not alone (*Points flashlight skyward.*) out thar.

MILLIE: Ya mean . . . ?

PERCY: Ouder space!

MOLLIE: Pa's gonna say, "Ya finally lost it, Percy."

PERCY: Not when I've already seen it.

MILLIE: YA . . .

MOLLIE: . . . DID?

PERCY: Sure I did, twice.

MILLIE: 'Nd ya never told Pa?

PERCY: He wouldn't believe.

MOLLIE: I don't know if'en I believe either.

MILLIE: The thought of bein' watched from out thar just kinda makes me feel kinda all creepy all over.

MOLLIE: What makes ya think we's bein' watched from out thar?

MILLIE: How else would they know we was hidden away in this hyar holler? No one else knows.

PERCY: They wanna take a bunch of us back with 'em.

MILLIE AND MOLLIE: (*Horrified.*) NO!

PERCY: Ssh-hhhh.

MILLIE: (*Frightened beyond belief.*) Why they wanna do that?

PERCY: So's they can do weird experiments on our insides. See wut we's made of. Then figure out how they can make more of us. Nifty, huh?!

MILLIE: More of us?

MOLLIE: Why'd they want to make more Rooters? Thar's thirteen already! Not countin' Ma 'nd Pa 'nd the one maybe on the way.

PERCY: I dunno how they found us or why they wanna make more of us, must be yer hillbilly charm, Mollie.

MOLLIE: Ya'r makin' all this up!

PERCY: Ya'll see.

MOLLIE: No I won't, 'cause I'm dartin' back home in a hurry. (*Starts to exit.*)

Suddenly, the whirring noise, louder than before, right behind MOLLIE, scaring her just like PERCY claimed it would. Both MOLLIE and MILLIE scream triple bloody murder.

PERCY: *(Urging.)* Hide! *(They click off their flashlights and scurry to hide.)*

Foreboding silence. Followed by a high-pitched, cackling laugh.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

The backyard of the Rooter clan's ramshackle home. Next morning and PA'S shining Betsy, his BB gun, with an old, torn handkerchief and singing some ancient mountain tune louder than most people can stand. With every note off pitch!

MA: *(Entering and with great disbelief.)* Yer not thinkin' of goin' tonight, are ya really, Pa?

PA: Nope, Ma *(Pausing to spit shine a portion of Betsy.)* I'm not **thinkin'** of goin'.

MA: Thank my lucky stars! Fer once, Elmer, yer usin' the head given to ya since birth fer more than a bed 'nd breakfast fer cooties.

PA: I've decided I'm goin'.

MA: Wut's gotten into ya, Pa? This time ya finally done took leave of yer senses.

PA: My decision's final, Samanthamae! No amount of sweet talkin' on yer part's gonna change wut's already made up, my mind!

MA: Ya just cain't go, Pa, object of all my dreams day 'nd night.

PA: Don't ya even start tryin', Ma, 'cause all yer purtty words 'bout me ain't gonna change a thing.

MA: Can't ya listen to reason, Elmer? Lizard Lips Huyett - he's one of them no account Huyetts from down in da swamp.

PA: Nothin' truer's ever been said in this end of the holler or the next three hollers over fer that matter.

- MA:** Why's ya gonna risk startin' everythin' back up again? Specially when things cain't stay da way they is.
- PA:** 'Cause at what Lizard Lips calls a concert tonight when he goes tryin ta hit one of them high notes when he's singin', me 'nd Betsy hyar (*Indicates his gun.*), the two of us got a meetin' with his backside. We'll kinda help him along to reach that high note, if'en ya know what I mean.
- MA:** 'Nd if'en Lizard Lips don't try to hit no high notes, then wut, Elmer?
- PA:** Shucks, Ma, don't talk so blamed foolish. What country sanger don't hit high notes every once in a while?
- MA:** Lizard Lips. He's a baritone.
- PA:** I don't care wut tone he is. Tonight the backside of Lizard Lips 'nd the front part of Betsy are gonna meet. 'Nd I'm doin' the introducin'!
- MA:** Wut ya got against Lizard Lips anyways, Pa?
- PA:** He's a Huyett. 'Nuf sed.
- MA:** Ya don't even know Lizard Lips, Elmer. He could turn out ta be a real nice feller.
- PA:** Yep, he could. But if'en that was the case, why'd he go 'nd let hisself be born a Huyett.
- MA:** Did he have a choice? Just like yer young'uns?
- PA:** Kinda makes you feel real sorry for him right off the bat, doesn't it?
- MA:** 'Nd how're ya expectin' to get to Lizard Lips' concert tonight?
- PA:** Same way I git to everywhere else, day or night. Shoe leather express.
- MA:** Traipsin' down through da swamp? Ain't safe, Pa, not these days, not wif Crazy Sally takin' ta totin' a gun here of late. She jest might take ya fer a varmint of some kind, specially since last week she thought my rhubarb was a radio antenna.
- PA:** Only way to git to the other holler where the concert is, is through the swamp. I ain't scared. Of nuthin'. 'Nd specially of some old fool woman jest showed up hyar almost twenty years ago, sight unseen. Jest kinda dropped off like some unwanted cat wif sore eyes.
- MA:** But the swamp's Huyett territory, and ya know holler policy.
- PA:** Betsy'll be ridin' with me, Ma, shotgun.

MA: 'Nd if'en y'er suddenly ambushed in the dark of night?

PA: Pray for the Huyett who ambushes me, Ma. 'Cause when I git done with 'im, wut's left won't be worth pickin' up to bury.

MA: (*Shaking her head, worried.*) Wish I could talk ya outta goin' tonight.

PA: Wish all ya want to, Ma. 'Nd that's all it'll be. 'Cause I got some business to handle tonight. 'Nd it's gonna be handled. Lizard Lips' pap done made a fool outta me once too offen now. Thet cain't go un-revenged.

MA: Makes no sense. No sense at all. Y'er riskin' what's gotta happen some day into the future.

PA: Over my dead body.

MA: Might come to that. (*Looking heavenward.*) Please, Lord, no.

PA: I got my pride, Ma, 'nd when somebody steps all over it (*His feet complementing his words.*), then whooshes me into the mud, (*His hands complementing these words.*) watch out!

SCHMOO: (*Entering real fast-like.*) Hey, Pa! Hey, Pa! Can it be?

PA: I don't know. Can it?

SCHMOO: Did I hear right?

PA: If yer ears was cleaned in the last year, I guess you might have.

SCHMOO: 'Bout you goin' to Lizard Lip's concert tonight?

PA: News sure travels fast in this holler. I jest sed I was goin' not ten minutes ago to yer Ma standin' hyar.

MA: Standin' hyar wastin' my breath when I should be out back shuckin' corn fer tonight's fixin's.

SCHMOO: Say it ain't true, Pa.

PA: I could, but then I'd be lyin'.

SCHMOO: Ya cain't go, Pa.

PA: My family sure is gettin' quick to tell me wut I can 'nd cain't do nowadays. Makes me think I dun up 'nd left doin' my job as Pa.

SCHMOO: Ya mustn't go, Pa. Please.

PA: It's decided, final, 'nd that means . . .

MA: A cow kick to his head wouldn't change it. Or hurt his head any either.

SCHMOO: It won't be safe. Not tonight. Not fer you, a Rooter, Pa, 'nd Lizard Lips, a Huyett. Them Huyetts'll be gunnin' fer ya.

PA: Betsy here'll make most everythin' about even.

SCHMOO: A BB gun, Pa? Y'er sure about that?

PA: Is Skunk Crik filled with bullfrogs, catfish, and green slime floatin' all over top?

SCHMOO: I'm real skeered fer ya, Pa.

PA: No reason to be, Schmoo. Me 'nd Betsy's gonna sit right up front, second or third row, so Lizard Lips is real close like.

SCHMOO: Never thought I'd live to see the day when my Pa'd actually git in a canoe wiffout a paddle, but I think I'm seein' it now.

MA: Yep, Schmoo, Pa's gonna shoot hisself tryin' to find out whut end the BB comes out of.

PA: Would you two quit yer belly-achin'? Me 'nd Betsy's goin' tonight. 'Nd that's all thar is to it. I don't wantta hear no more about it from any of ya.

MA: Yer gonna miss, Elmer, even up close in the second row.

PA: Doubtin' my aimin' ability, Samanthamae?

MA: Not when yer target's standin' still. Yer purtty good then. It's when wut yer shootin' at moves. That's a horse of a diffrent color.

PA: Not any more, it ain't. Last two days, I been practicin' behind the barn. On rabbits.

SCHMOO: Ya ain't been cruel to helpless little bunnies, have you, Pa? Please tell me that ain't true. Not about my Pa.

MA: It ain't. Bunnies move.

PA: But Lizard Lips won't.

MA: Where'd do ya come off sayin' that?

PA: Ya think Lizard Lips is gonna hop all over the place when he's singin'?

MA: Elvis did.

PA: Lizard Lips ain't no Elvis.

MA: 'Nd Pa, you ain't no John Wayne.

SCHMEE: (*Rushing onstage, lickety-split.*) Pa! Ma! Pa! Ma!

PA: What's itchin' ya so early in da mornin', Schmee?

SCHMEE: Any of you seen Mollie, Millie, 'nd Percy since you've been up?

PA: Wasn't particularly lookin' fer 'em.

MA: Probably still in bed. You know those three. They was born tired 'nd ain't caught up yet.

SCHMEE: They all three left the house late last night.

SCHMOO: You the momma of this clan now? Knowin' what every kid does 'nd when.

SCHMEE: They's got up in da middle of the night, right outta their beds, 'nd started headin' 'round back.

PA: Nature calls even at night too, ya know, Schmee.

SCHMEE: They didn't stop thar, Pa, none of 'em. Jest kept creepin' down toward the crik a ways. That's what I saw.

PA: Moon was out bright last night. Maybe they went out treein' 'coons or baggin' snipes or diggin' up night crawlers.

SCHMEE: Wiffout the dogs, a bag, or a shovel?

PA: Ya gotta understand, Schmee. Percy's strange at times. He's always been diffrent from the rest of us Rooters ever since I knowed him which was not more'n two or three minutes after Ma welcomed him inta da holler.

SCHMEE: 'Nd Mollie 'nd Millie? They's strange too?

PA: Not quite so much as Percy, but lately, they're gettin' purtty close.

SCHMEE: Well, this mornin', they're all gone.

PA: What'd ya mean, "All gone?"

SCHMEE: Not to be found. Anywhere.

SCHMOO: Who's lookin'? They ain't hyar just means more to go 'round at the supper table.

MA: Why so worried, Schmee?

SCHMEE: 'Cause somethin' mighty funny's goin' on 'round these parts here of late.

SCHMOO: Haven't heard nobody laughin' though.

SCHMEE: Not laughin' funny, Schmoo. Somethin' Percy sed ta me two nights before last, over 'nd over again. (*Making herself all weird so she can imitate her brother.*) "Soon ya'll believe. Soon ya'll believe." That's all he sed. Jest stared right straight into my eyes, real weird like.

SCHMEE points toward the sky, imitating PERCY. With a puzzled look, PA stares upward, toward the sky. So does MA, even more puzzled. SCHMOO just looks bewildered.

SCHMEE: 'Nd once he sed, (*Again, weird-like.*) "We are not alone."

PA: Now ya know Percy ain't exactly a full bucket. Our family's lived alone up at this end of Hatchet Holler ever since before my grandpappy's time 'nd long before that even. Only other person ever wandered up hyar in all that time was Crazy Sally. 'Nd someone as crazy as her don't count as a person.

MA: Schmee . . . Mollie, Millie, 'nd Percy'll be home when they git hungry.

SCHMEE: If'en they come home, that is, Ma.

Entering, singing, a happy mountain ditty, and carrying a basket full of dandelions.

SUNFLOWER: (*Stopping her singing when she sees Ma.*) Found a whole field of dandelions, Ma.

PA: Ya've been gone so long this mornin', Sunflower, those dandelions coulda sprouted from a seed, growed up, bloomed yellor, 'nd gone back ta seed in da time it took ya ta pick 'em.

SUNFLOWER: The field's a long walk, Pa.

PA: I'm beginnin' to git my suspicions, Sunflower.

MA: (*Quickly.*) Well, brang those fresh-picked dandelions right away inta da house, Sunflower. Supper table's gonna be worth comin' ta tonight. (*Ma and Sunflower exit.*)

PA: (*Watching them exit.*) Somethin' funny goin' on, 'nd I thinkin' I know what it is. Singin' so early in the mornin', ya must be crazy.

SCHMOO: But ya were singin', Pa. I heard ya up hyar from way down in da holler.

PA: (*Starting to exit.*) I stands on wut I sed.

SCHMEE: Where's ya goin', Pa?

PA: There's a few rabbits out back behind the barn that need practicin' on.

SCHMEE: Don't nobody care three of our clans vanished in the night?! Without a trace?

PA: (*Stopping to comment.*) We're so far away from anythin', Schmee 'nd Schmoo, where can they vanish to? 'Nd besides, just in case the somethin' funny around here is what I thinks, Schmee 'nd Schmoo, the trap's still set?

SCHMOO: The trap's always set, Pa. First thing we check on after we gets up in the mornin' 'nd visits out back.

SCHMEE: Jest come from over thar, Pa, 'nd Schmoo's right. Trap's set. (*Demonstrates how it works from start to finish as she describes the trap.*) One step in the wrong place 'nd yer foot's in the rope 'nd yer whipped up toward the sky, real quick, hangin' upside down, faster than yar brain can work ta tell ya what happened to ya. Jest hangin' there, swangin' back 'n forth, wishin' ya wasn't hangin' there, swangin' back 'n forth.

PA: (*Exiting.*) Sure like to catch "just once" one of them Huyetts in that trap. That'd larn 'em a lesson, swangin' upside down awhile, 'bout snoopin' around these parts always watchin' us Rooters.

SCHMOO: Ya sure Mollie, Millie, 'nd Percy's gone?

SCHMEE: Purtineer.

SCHMOO: Somebody took 'em?

SCHMEE: Who'd want 'em?

SCHMOO: They snuck off then?

SCHMEE: Where'd they sneak off to?

SCHMOO: Maybe down to the Huyetts' place. They got the nicest-lookin' boys, especially the second oldest . . . all muscles.

SCHMEE: How'd ya know?

SCHMOO: I looked.

SCHMEE: (*Gasps.*) Ya know we ain't supposed ta be anywheres near the Huyetts' place.

SCHMOO: Nobody saw me. Not even da Huyett. He was swimmin' in da hole.

SCHMEE: Ya went all the way down thar?! Just to watch?

SCHMOO: Ain't but half a day's walk, even if yer slow about it. 'Nd it was worth ev'ry step.

SCHMEE: Not if'en Pa finds out.

SCHMOO: What I saw wuz worth Pa findin' out. 'Nd then some. Ya just cain't imagine how purtty he is, that second oldest Huyett. Ya gotta see fer yerself, Schmee.

SCHMEE: 'Nd risk a lickin'!

SCHMOO: Who'll know? Besides, shouldn't we look some more for Mollie, Millie, 'nd Percy?

SCHMEE: Wut good's that gonna do?

SCHMOO: If'en we don't find our kin, we might see theirs. Like I already sed, them Huyetts is real purtty to look at, believe me, Schmee, real purtty indeed, most everyone of 'em. All boys, 'nd most of the time they don't wear shirts.

SCHMEE: Schmoo! What're you sayin'?

SCHMOO: Why should Sunflower be da only Rooter picked?

SCHMEE: Ya ain't sposed to know that.

SCHMOO: Sunflower's got a secret, Schmoo can have a secret.

SCHMEE: Ya mean ya wish ya'd have a secret.

SCHMOO: Wishin' don't get it done, Schmee. 'Nd the way I figure it: let Pa wallop me fer lookin'. We Rooters is all girls anyways.

SCHMEE: Forgettin' Percy Rooter?

SCHMOO: Like Pa says, a person so crazy don't count.

SCHMEE: Don't talk that way 'bout kin.

SCHMOO: Ever wonder 'bout that, Schmee? Why Percy's so diffrent from all the rest of us?

SCHMEE: Fer one thing, he's a boy. That's one big difference right off.

SCHMOO: Yeah, like all them Huyetts is boys. 'Nd we's the only two families in this whole entire holler. No matter what Pa does with his switch, sooner or later, we's all gotta meet face-ta-face or we's all—the Rooters and the Huyetts—gonna be history.

SCHMEE: Pa won't let that day happen.

SCHMOO: Shucks, Pa ain't never gonna let the day happen. That's why we gotta take matters into our own hands. Like Sunflower's already dun.

SCHMEE: Are ya sayin' what I think yer sayin'?

SCHMOO: I reckon I is. Nature keeps movin' on ya know.

SCHMEE: Think maybe thar'd be two Huyetts swimmin' in the hole this mornin'?

SCHMOO: Don't know til we look.

SCHMEE: Got all yer chores done yet?

SCHMOO: Yep. Before I forked down breakfast, Shinny wuz already milked dry 'nd the goats wuz all let out inta the pasture on the hill back behind the barn.

SCHMEE: Same here.

SCHMOO: Then what's holdin' us back?

SCHMEE: Nuthin' 'cept our own barefeet.

SCHMOO: Then let's get 'em movin'. (*They excitedly hurry offstage.*)

From offstage, off in the distance: the sound of Betsy BB and then:

PA: (*Miffed.*) Missed! (*Angry.*) Stop movin', ya dern long-eared critters.

From another area offstage:

MA: Like I told ya, Pa, Lizard Lips' backside is safe.

From another area offstage: a very loud, startled and terrified scream!

SCHMICK: (*Rushing onstage.*) Pa! Pa! Come quick! We caught ourselves one!

PA: (*Rushing onstage.*) By jiminy, did we finally catch ourselves a Huyett?

SCHMICK: Couldn't tell right off, Pa, when they's hangin' upside down 'nd swangin' back 'n forth.

From offstage: another scream, "HELP!"

PA: Sounds like a woman, Schmick.

SCHMICK: But them Huyetts is all boys, Pa.

PA: All that we know about anyways. But with the Huyetts things change 'long about every springtime.

MA: (*Hurrying onstage.*) Pa! Pa! Someone's in the trap!

From offstage: another scream, "HELP!"

PA: We hear thet, Ma. We hear thet real good.

MA: Ya gotta do somethin', Elmer!

Unseen by anyone except the audience, sneaking behind some of the junk onstage is CRAZY SALLY. She pops her head up from time to time, looks around, real crazy like, then quickly bolts behind some other junk somewhere else onstage. If ever there was someone loony, CRAZY SALLY fills the bill, one hundred percent and then some.

PA: Wut's the hurry, Samantha-mae?

MA: Wut??!!

PA: Now that it's come, we gotta enjoy the fact we finally caught ourselves one of them Huyetts fer as long as we kin.

MA: 'Nd if'en it ain't a Huyett swangin' at the end of yer rope?

PA: Gotta be, Ma. Ya know that. Who knows we're even up hyar in this holler?

From offstage: another scream, "Please somebody. Anybody!" Popping her head up, looking in the direction of the trap, Crazy Sally seems to be wondering about the scream.

SCHMICK: Want me to go 'nd cut whichever Huyett it is down, Pa?

PA: Hold yer horses, Schmick. We'll get around to it soon enuf.

MA: (*Exiting.*) If you ain't the dernest, Elmer Rooter, lettin' that poor person swang upside down screamin', all their blood rushin' outta their veins. Sure hope ya don't get a dose of yer own onrey medicine some day, Elmer.

Rushing onstage, out of breath:

MIRANDA: Help! My partner's hanging upside down in a tree!

PA: Who're you?

From offstage: another scream, weaker now, "Help me! Quick!"

MIRANDA: That scream's my business associate.

PA: Ain't ever seen you befer. Ya a new Huyett?

SCHMICK: Couldn't be just since last springtime, Pa.

MIRANDA: This is no time for discussions. Help me get Sarah Lynn out of that whatever it is.

PA: It's a trap, lady. 'Nd now we know it's a purtty good one at that!

MIRANDA: What?!

PA: Both of you appears to be trespassin' on Rooters' land. That trap's set up fer that very reason.

MIRANDA: (*Very strong.*) You'll help get Sarah Lynn out of that tree, mister, and now, or the sun don't shine where you're going tonight.

PA: Real upity fer a trespasser, ain't ya?

MIRANDA: I've got a court order says I can cross any property line on this mountain.

PA: Says who?

From offstage: a very weak, "I'm . . ."

MIRANDA: (*Rushing offstage.*) Coming, Sarah Lynn. Hold on one moment longer! I'm coming!

PA: (*Puzzled.*) Now if that don't beat all.

SCHMICK: Strangers, Pa?

PA: Must be. Never seen her before.

SCHMICK: Huyett kin?

PA: Talks too good to be that 'nd she's wearin' shoes.

SCHMICK: Think we oughtta help?

PA: Ma'd probly say so. (*They both exit.*)

From behind her last hiding place, CRAZY SALLY stands up, looks around, then creeps downstage moving toward a pile of junk on which she leaves a note. She looks around, then rushes offstage, not as careful as when she first sneaked on. A split second later, a harried

MIRANDA and an exhausted, frazzled SARAH LYNN enter, close on the heels of PA and SCHMICK.

MIRANDA: *(Speaking before she even hits the stage.)* Somebody could get really hurt, mister, having something that dangerous hidden so close to your home.

SARAH LYNN: *(Weakly.)* Yes.

PA: Sposed to.

MIRANDA: WHAT?!

PA: Told ya befer. That rope's a trap to stop trespassers.

MIRANDA: We're not trespassers.

PA: What'd ya doin' here then?

MIRANDA: Official business.

PA: Now don't that beat all? Nobody comes here in more'n forty some years, if that, 'nd then, when somebody does, it's official business. If'en ya don't mind my askin', wut kind of official business?

MIRANDA: We represent the Darke County Board of Education.

PA: Never heard of it.

MIRANDA: We suspected as much.

SARAH LYNN: We're here on behalf of the school district, sir.

PA: *(Proudly.)* Rooter, if yer wantin' my family name.

MIRANDA: *(Taking out a notepad and pencil.)* First name, Mr. Rooter?

PA: Yep.

MIRANDA: Yep, what?

PA: I gotta first name. Doesn't everybody?

MIRANDA: What is it, Mr. Rooter?

PA: When Ma's not mad, it's usually Elmer. When she is mad 'nd Samanthamae's hotter than a pistol, my name could be most anythin' decent folks wouldn't be caught dead sayin'.

SARAH LYNN: So you're married?

SCHMICK: How else you gonna explain me?

MIRANDA: You are . . . ?

SCHMICK: Schmick Rooter, Ma 'n Pa's daughter.

SARAH LYNN: Only daughter?

PA: If'en she was, it'd sure make fittin' 'round the supper table a whole lot easier.

Suddenly, from offstage, in the same direction as the trap, another startled scream. Rushing onstage:

LULU: *(Excitedly shouting.)* PA! We dun caught somebody agin!

PA: No one shows their face 'round here fer more 'n forty years, suddenly, three folks in five minutes. What in tarnation is goin' on at this end of the holler?

MIRANDA: It's no one associated with us, Mr. Rooter.

From offstage: another scream, "Help!"

MA: *(Rushing onstage, all beside herself.)* Pa! Somebody else -

PA: We hear, Ma.

MIRANDA: Mrs. Rooter, perhaps?

MA: Not after thirteen young'uns with one more, or less, on the way, it's not "perhaps."

SARAH LYNN: *(Dumbfounded.)* Thirteen! *(As Miranda writes the number "13" in her notepad.)*

PA: If'en we count right when they all show up fer supper it is.

MIRANDA: All thirteen living at home?

From offstage: another scream, "Elmer Rooter!"

MA: PAAaaa?

PA: Don't worry, Ma. Nobody's died yet, not from gettin' caught in that thar trap.

MA: Nobody's ever been caught before five minutes ago.

SCHMICK: *(Exiting.)* I'll go 'nd git 'em down, Pa.

LULU: *(Eager to help.)* I'll help. It'll be my first time ever usin' my butcher knife fer more'n skinnin' squirrels. *(Exiting.)*

PA: *(Shouting after Lulu.)* Don't use yer butcher knife on the rope, Lulu! Rope won't be any good if'en it's cut in two.

SCHMICK: (*Rushing back onstage.*) PA! We's caught ourselves a genuine Huyett!

PA: How'd ya know fer sure?

SCHMICK: He ain't got no shirt on.

PA: Leave 'im danglin' up thar a tad longer then, Schmick.

SCHMICK: (*Exiting.*) Love to, Pa.

MA: Elmer, ya cain't do that!

MIRANDA: Mr. Rooter! How inhumane!

PA: Those Huyetts know better than to trespass up hyar in this end of the holler. This is Rooter land. They deserves whatever they git.

CHOAT: (*From offstage.*) Get me down outta here, Rooters.

LULU: (*Rushing onstage; all flustered.*) Pa, this one hangin' in our tree. He's real, real cute . . . can we keep him?

PA: Not on yar life, Lulu.

CHOAT: (*From offstage.*) I'm warnin' ya, Rooter! Git me down outta this tree! Now!

MA: He sounds mad, Pa!

PA: (*Yelling to Schmick.*) Help 'im down, Schmick. 'Nd don't be gentle 'bout it.

Everybody onstage looks offstage. They crane their heads up, then down, stopping with a sudden jerk of their heads, apparently following the quick descent and earth-shaking "kerplunk" of CHOAT.

CHOAT: (*Rushing onstage, every bit like Lulu described and then some. He's followed onstage by Schmick and Lulu, their eyes bugged half way out of their heads, Choat's so cute.*) Elmer Rooter, I've got a message from my pap fer ya.

PA: Yar pap afraid to come hisself, he has to have one of his pups come up hyar?

CHOAT: My pap's afraid of nuthin'.

PA: Reckon so. When he's got young'uns who look like the Huyetts look, I guess he thinks he kin scare anything off.

SARAH LYNN: (*To Miranda.*) I don't know if I'd be scared off.

PA: Okay, Huyett, say your pap's message right quick, here 'n now. Then git on home.

MIRANDA: (*To Choat.*) Excuse me, you live around here, young man?

CHOAT: Wouldn't be caught dead in this neck of da holler.

PA: Ya don't get outta hyar soon, ya jest might be.

MA: Lower yar lid, Pa, this one ain't ever done nuthin to ya.

PA: He wuz born a Huyett, wasn't he?

MIRANDA: You're not one of the thirteen Rooter children?

PA: (*Snapping at Miranda.*) Wut's wrong with ya? Didn't I jest say he "wuz born a Huyett?" Ya think we got so many we don't know our own? Besides, would Ma 'nd me leave our own flesh 'n blood danglin' in a tree?

MA: Like Pa says he's a Huyett, Ma'am. The Rooters is all girls, 'cept one. Percy.

PA: 'Nd sometimes, we're not so sure he's ours, he's a little strange.

SARAH LYNN: Any other family in this holler?

PA: If'en thar is, they's trespassers. (*Indicating Choat.*) His kind live down in da swamp. Have to wrestle alligators every night jest fer a place to sleep.

MIRANDA: (*Writing the name "Huyett" in her pad.*) How many Huyetts call the swamp home?

CHOAT: Who wants to know?

PA: Ya ain't got time to find out, Huyett.

MIRANDA: (*Unperturbed by Pa.*) Darke County Board of Education.

CHOAT: Who?

SARAH LYNN: The people responsible for the schools in this county.

CHOAT: The wut?!

PA: Enuf pleasant conversatin', ladies. Huyett, let's hear yer pap's message? Then, yer outta hyar before I forgit myself 'nd do somethin' dumb.

MA: Must forgit yerself purtineer everyday then.

PA: Maaa -

CHOAT: "STOP WATCHIN' US." Pap's gettin' mighty upset with ya Rooters watchin' us all the time, specially late at night.

PA: Yer 'ole pap's crazy as a bedbug! No Rooter'd waste any time or any sleep watchin' a Huyett!

CHOAT: Better think agin, Elmer Rooter. We's bein' watched almost every day 'n night of late. 'Nd we's gettin' purtty tired of it.

PA: (*Fingering Betsy.*) Betsy's 'bout to say yer pap's wrong!

CHOAT: Don't matter wut Betsy says. We know wut we know. Stop watchin' us.

PA: Why'd we do such a fool thing like thet?

SARAH LYNN: (*Admiring Choat.*) Doesn't seem like such a bad idea to me.

CHOAT: Next time one of us Huyetts sees someone watchin' us their backsides gonna be stingin'. No questions asked. Consider yerselves warned good 'n proper, Rooter.

PA: Ya sting a Rooter's backside, son, it'll be the last backside any Huyett ever stings. Ever! Ya hear?

CHOAT: I'm so scared I'm gonna run home 'nd have pap move all us Huyetts into the next holler.

PA: Ya delivered yer fool message, Huyett, now scram!

CHOAT: (*As he's exiting.*) Don't take my pap's warnin' like it don't mean nuthin', Rooter.

PA: We'll give it as much regard as we'd give anything else a Huyett says. Which is, as ya just sed, "nuthin'. (*Turning back to Miranda and Sarah Lynn.*) Now, ya two, let's hear yer official business, then you two hit the trail back down outta here, right quick.

MIRANDA: We need to verify how many people live up in this holler.

PA: Us. That's it. 'Nd the reason?

MIRANDA: Your children have to go to school . . . fall term starts in three weeks.

PA: Never did before. 'Nd the Rooters all turned out okay.

SARAH LYNN: This holler's part of Darke County. State law says all Darke County children must attend school.

SCHMICK: Wut's school, Pa?

PA: Somethin' ya don't need. Just like we don't need Huyetts. Imagine them thinkin' a Rooter stands around watchin' 'em.

MIRANDA: I'm writing down thirteen Rooter children. Come three weeks from now, in early September, thirteen Rooter children better be in school.

PA: Says who?

MIRANDA: Darke County and the state of Kentucky.

PA: Darke County 'nd the state of Ken-tuck-ee feed 'nd clothe my children?

MIRANDA: Those are parenting responsibilities, Mr. Rooter.

PA: Yer right on that one. 'Nd Ma 'nd me, we're doin' just fine here on our own. Us Rooters have been fer four, soon goin' on five generations. Without no help from beyond this holler.

MIRANDA: It's the law.

PA: They go off to school, my girls, next thing ya know, they won't come back to this here holler. They don't come back, in a couple of years, who's gonna take care of Ma 'nd me?

MIRANDA: School will give your children an education and prepare your children to do a better job when and should that time ever come.

PA: Ya cain't improve on love, missus.

MIRANDA: The law's the law.

PA: Besides, my children'd have to go through the swamp ta get ta anything even like a school. 'Nd ya just heard 'ole Huyett's message: "Get near Huyett property, ya won't be sittin' down for quite a while." 'Nd the Huyetts mean what they say, lady. Just like us Rooters, only we're honest folk.

SARAH LYNN: The Huyett children will have to go to school, too.

PA: Now I know my kids ain't goin' fer sure!

MIRANDA: Suit yourself, Mr. Rooter. But when your children don't show up for school in three weeks, the lawmen will show up here.

PA: Betsy ain't afraid of no lawmen.

SARAH LYNN: Betsy another daughter?

PA: Yeah. (*Slinging Betsy upward.*)

MIRANDA and SARAH LYNN scream bloody murder. MA runs to grab PA'S arm, all the while shouting, "No, Pa!" while trying to pull both PA'S arm and Betsy downward, toward the ground. SCHMICK and LULU take themselves a laughing fit.

PA: I'm warnin' both of you -

MA: (*Tuggin on his arm.*) No, Pa!

PA: Git off'en my arm, Ma. Leave Betsy ta do her job.

MA: They ain't done nuthin' to ya, Pa.

MIRANDA: We're reporting this to the authorities.

PA: Have ta git outta da holler first.

MA: No, Pa!

PA: Schmick, git me some rope! (*Schmick and Lulu, shouting "Goody, goody!" run to get some rope, offstage.*)

MIRANDA: You lay one finger on us, Mr. Rooter, the Darke County SWAT team will surround yer house in no time flat.

MA: Pa, let 'em be! Let 'em go back to where they came from.

PA: Ain't ya heard wut these two've been sayin', Samanthamae?

They's gonna take our children away from us. (*Looking at Miranda and Sarah Lynn.*) 'Nd nobody's doin' that, ya hear. Not the two of youse! 'Nd not the Huyetts down in da swamp!

SCHMICK: (*Rushing onstage.*) Pa, there's no rope anywheres around 'cept the trap rope still hangin' from the tree.

PA: Then we dangle 'em both from that thar tree.

MIRANDA AND SARAH LYNN: Nooooo!

PA: (*Moving Betsy in the direction of the trap.*) Go on ya two, no dilly-dallyin'.

MA: (*Rushing to stand in front of Miranda and Sarah Lynn.*) Over my dead body, Elmer.

PA: Don't make me think twice, Ma.

MA: Who'll take care of all fifteen of us, cook all the meals, clean up the house, slop the hogs, feed 'nd water the chickens twice a day, make all the girls' clothes, 'nd still have time to play ya checkers after supper, Pa, if'en ya forgit yerself now?

PA: Yer right, Ma! (*To Schmick.*) Get the trap rope off'en the tree 'nd bring it here.

SCHMICK: Can I tie 'em up when I git the rope?

PA: Know how to make a knot, Schmick?

SCHMICK: Made a knot 'round Tom Turkey's neck last Thanksgivin', didn't I?

PA: We ate Tom, so it musta been a good one. Go on. Hurry! (*Schmick exits real fast.*)

SCHMICK: (*Yelling as she exits.*) Get the rope down, Lulu!

MIRANDA: Mr. Rooter, you better come to your senses.

MA: Don't waste yer breath, missus. He dun lost all his marbles this mornin' with a decision he made.

SARAH LYNN: The county knows we're here. So, if we don't return to our offices today, the sheriff will come looking for us.

PA: I'm serious 'bout what I sed.

MIRANDA: Your children need an education, Mr. Rooter.

SCHMICK: (*Rushing onstage, rope in hand, Lulu hanging on to one end, real happy-like.*) Got it, Pa!

PA: See if'en ya can tie another knot, Schmick.

SCHMICK doesn't need to be asked twice; LULU not at all. Together, the girls quickly begin winding the rope around MIRANDA and SARAH LYNN.

MA: Yer gonna have to tie me up with 'em, Pa!

SCHMICK: We cain't do that to our maw!

LULU: NO!

PA: What're ya tryin' ta do, Samanthamae? Rip this family apart!

MA: Ya've got to listen to reason, Elmer. We cain't stay livin' the way we been livin'. It's gotta be sed, Pa, our girls gotta have the one chance we never had.

PA: Not today they don't.

MA: Ya won't admit it to yerself, Pa. The Rooters 'nd the Huyetts is gonna have to git together.

PA: Never! Not after what they dun to me.

MA: Swaller yer pride, Elmer!

PA: Stow it, Ma! Tie 'em all up, Schmick!

SCHMICK: Not Ma! Not doin' it, Pa!

PA: Lulu, ya do it!

LULU: Cain't, Pa!

PA: Blamed if I won't do it myself. Hand me the dern rope.

PA takes two steps toward the girls, aiming to pick up the rope, when suddenly there's another scream offstage, where the rope trap used to be. PA turns in the direction of the scream, and in that split second

when PA'S back is turned, MIRANDA and SARAH LYNN take off, faster than they've ever run in all their lives. MA also moves toward the direction of the scream.

SCHMICK and LULU are about to head toward the trap area when onstage run MOLLIE and MILLIE, shouting quadruple bloody murder. They both talk real loud, real fast, and real hysterical . . . almost everything they say is one long and continuous, breathless sentence as if only one was saying it.

MOLLIE: It got him! It got him!

MILLIE: It got Percy!

MOLLIE: It was worse than ya can ever imagine!

MILLIE: We just barely escaped from it with our lives! We was runnin' faster than those dern roosters o'er yonder.

MOLLIE: Percy's gone!

MILLIE: Fer good!

MA: Mollie! Millie! Calm down a might!

MILLIE: *(All atwitter.)* This soul-stirrin', spine-tinglin', mind-blowin' glow came outta nowhere!

MOLLIE: *(Completely agreeing.)* From up thar!

MILLIE: *(Pulling away from Pa, acting weird-like, imitating Percy.)* We are not alone. We are not alone. *(Then rushing back to Pa, trying to make herself understood, pleading.)* We are NOT alone!

Suddenly, from the other side of the stage, MIRANDA and SARAH LYNN rush onstage, screaming, being chased by CRAZY SALLY, who's just being her loony self.

MA: *(Startled; turning and gasping.)* Crazy Sally!

CRAZY SALLY: *(Terribly loony, hurrying to Pa.)* Got-em-fer-ya! Got-em-fer-ya! Got-em-fer-ya!

MOLLIE: *(Acting like Percy.)* Soon ya'll believe. Soon ya'll believe. *(Rushing to Pa, trying to make herself understood, pleading.)* I believe! I believe!

MILLIE: I believe too! I saw it!

MA: (*Rushing to her girls.*) Who's got Percy?

PA: Them Huyetts lay one hand on my Percy, they're alligator bait!

CRAZY SALLY: Got-em-fer-ya! Got-em-fer-ya! (*And she runs offstage, but not without first leaving another note on a pile of junk.*)

MOLLIE: It wasn't a Huyett, Pa! It was it!!

PA: Make sense, girl.

MILLIE: Ya'd know what she means, Pa, if'en ya'd been thar.

MOLLIE: Late last night -

MILLIE: Down near the swamp -

PA: That's Huyett territory! What'cha doin' down thar?

MOLLIE: Believe you me, it don't care whose is what!

MOLLIE starts making a whirring noise and at the same time whirls around and around and around. MILLIE jumps into MOLLIE'S whirring circle, takes on a truly weird appearance, then moves out of MOLLIE'S circle, toward SCHMICK. She reaches her two grasping hands out toward SCHMICK, trying to grab SCHMICK, who screams in terror, rushing toward her PA. Seeing this frenzy as their golden opportunity, MIRANDA and SARAH LYNN beat it out of there, scurrying offstage.

PA: (*Shouting.*) Hush, girls! All of ya! Now what's this all 'bout?

From offstage, yet very close: the loud whirring noise. Simultaneously:

MOLLIE: (*Rushing offstage, in a direction away from the noise.*)
That's it! That's it! HHHHEELLLLPPPP us!

MILLIE: (*Rushing after her sister.*) Save us from it! It's gonna have us
for a bedtime snack!

MA: (*Following her girls.*) Mollie! Millie! Don't scamper off! Safety in
numbers!

PA: (*Heading toward the noise, with Betsy ready.*) I'll save ya from it!
I'll save my family from it! Let's go, Betsy!

The lights fade to black. The whirring noise stops. A moment's foreboding silence, then a high-pitched laugh as the curtains close.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

Moments later. Two thugs, NYC small-time gangsters actually, make their way onstage, through all the Rooter's junk. The leader of the two speaks first, forever questioning his know-nothing, blundering subordinate.

FRANKIE: You're sure this is the place?

DECKO: Yep.

FRANKIE: You're certain?

DECKO: Yep.

FRANKIE: Absolutely definitely, positively this is the place?

DECKO: Yep to all three.

FRANKIE: On this mountain, this is the place farthest away from people of any kind.

DECKO: Yep.

FRANKIE: And no one knows this place exists?

DECKO: Yep.

FRANKIE: You've somehow checked?!

DECKO: Somehow.

FRANKIE: Through all the family's friends?

DECKO: And then some.

FRANKIE: No mistakes?

DECKO: Nope.

FRANKIE: Boss won't stand for any slip-ups of any kind on this one, Decko.

DECKO: Won't have to.

FRANKIE: Your neck if there is!

DECKO: Yep.

FRANKIE: And mine!

DECKO: Yep to both.

FRANKIE: Then tell me, Decko, *(Sifting through the junk.)* what is all this stuff? *(Decko shrugs his shoulders.)* All this junk just didn't walk here in the middle of nowhere by itself. *(Another shrug from Decko.)* Must be people here! *(Another shrug.)*

DECKO: Not according to the census.

FRANKIE: The census?!

DECKO: There's no record of anyone living here, ever. That's what our friends in high places claim.

FRANKIE: You'd trust our necks to a bunch of government hooligans?

DECKO: Seemed to know what they were talking about.

FRANKIE: Then I ask you again, ignoramus, how'd all this rubbish get here?

DECKO: Washed down the river . . . maybe?!

FRANKIE: From where? I'm telling you Decko, if something goes wrong here, we better start running and hope we're never found. 'Cause we're dealing with more'n just Buggy on this one.

DECKO: So what if someone lives here, Frankie, some mountain hick?

FRANKIE: Buggy doesn't want any interference, not from anyone.

DECKO: So, Frankie, one pop, we're home free.

FRANKIE: You gonna do that, Decko?

DECKO: If it means my neck.

From offstage:

PA: Ma! Girls! It's gone! Whatever it wuz is gone!

FRANKIE: (*Turning to Decko.*) It just might.

PA: (*Entering.*) Mustta been scared off when whatever it wuz saw me 'nd Betsy headin' lickety-split its way. (*Seeing the two thugs.*) WHOA, FEET! (*He stops abruptly.*) Fer cryin' out loud, who're you two?

FRANKIE: We might ask you the same question, (*Turns to Decko.*) Decko???

(*Who shrugs his shoulders in complete disbelief.*)

MA: (*Rushing onstage.*) Mollie 'nd Millie, Schmick 'nd Lulu, they's so petrified, they's teeth is chatterin'. They dun run off deep into the woods. (*Frankie, his eyebrows raised in obvious disgust, turns to Decko and holds up two fingers while mouthing the number "two?".*)

PA: (*Eyeing the two.*) More hubbub in Hatchet Holler, Ma.

MA: What's happenin' hyar all of a sudden?

PA: Somethin' mighty peculiar.



Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

HATCHET HOLLER

by Dan Neidermyer.

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