

LIFE AIN'T FAIR

A Play in Two Acts

by

Shelley Chester

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Cast of Characters

- BESSIE MEEKS: 67-year-old Great Aunt. Never married. Wise, strong, loving, in great shape. Not well educated, but very smart. A sturdy woman not afraid of anything. Very thick Tennessee mountains accent.
- JUSTIN: 14-year-old twin brother of Jamie. Small for his age Justin is strong and all boy. Great Grandnephew of Bessie.
- JAMIE: 14-year-old twin sister of Justin. She is pretty and smart with a long fresh scar on her face. Great Grandniece of Bessie.
- KAREN JONES: 53-year-old black woman. Attractive, educated, patient and very caring.
- JUDGE: 60 strong, no nonsense Judge. Male or female. Any race.

Scene

A broken-down shack in the mountains of Tennessee.

Time

The present.

Songs / Hymns

The Paw Paw Patch A traditional American folk song

Safe In The Arms Of Jesus by Frances J. Crosby

Let Us Be United by Barney E. Warren

Turkey in the Straw by Bryceson Treharne

Be Ye Strong in the Lord by Daniel W. Whittle

AUTHORS NOTE

The dialect in this play is open to actor's interpretation.

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Act I

Scene 1	Living area	Summer. Late afternoon.
Scene 2	Living area	Late morning one week later.
Scene 3	Living area	Late afternoon same day.
Scene 4	Living area	Middle of the night
Scene 5	Living area	Dawn the next morning.
Scene 6	Living area	A couple of minutes later

INTERMISSION

Act II

Scene 1	Living area	Late afternoon several weeks later. Early September.
Scene 2	Living area	Late afternoon A couple days later. September.
Scene 3	Living area	Late afternoon several weeks later. October.
Scene 4	Living area	Late afternoon two days later.
Scene 5	Living area	Evening same day.
Scene 6	Living area	Day. The next day.
Scene 7	Court Room	Day. Several days later.
Scene 8	Living area	Early evening. Several days later.

ACT IScene 1SETTING:

Summer, late afternoon in BESSIE'S shack of a house in the mountains of Tennessee. A fireplace doubles for a stove in the main area. Wood is stacked next to it. Over the mantle hang a shotgun and a burlap bag of shotgun shells. A fishing rod leans against the fireplace on the far side. The kitchen area has an icebox, an old fridge, old stove, a counter with a sink and open shelves. Another counter used to skin animals and fix things has cabinet doors. **One door will be replaced. The living area has a couch, a rocking chair, a table and chairs, two side tables with both electric lamps and oil burning lamps and a coffee table. Nothing matches and everything is well-worn or obviously repaired. There is a bathroom and three bedrooms with doors downstage left extending to offstage. Animal pelts are in various stages of tanning. Keys hang next to the front door. A bible is on a side table.

AT RISE:

BESSIE is in the kitchen cutting meat and stocking the icebox. She wears old jeans, a large man's shirt, long rubber gloves, and boots. She is singing when there's a KNOCK at the door.

BESSIE

It op'n! Tain't gots nuf'in werf stealin'.

(KAREN enter quickly and closes the door fast. She is dressed trendy New York casual. BESSIE turns around up to her elbows in blood, holding a large carving knife. KAREN gasps.)

BESSIE (CONT'D)

Why, howdy! Who be you?

KAREN
Oh, my gosh, are you bleeding?

BESSIE
I's jist skinnin' supper.

KAREN
I'm sorry to barge in but there is a wolf or coyote eating
an animal right outside!

(BESSIE looks out the window.)

BESSIE
Dat jist Cooter, he my dawg. Looky dere, he gots hissef a
big ol' ra'coon! Dem coons steal chick'in feed an' raids my
gard'n. Good on ya, Cooter!

KAREN
Your dog... You have a wolf as a pet? He doesn't seem too
friendly!

BESSIE
Cooter ain't no wolf. He jist big. He frien'ly once't he
gits ta know'd ya. Who be you?

KAREN
I'm sorry, my name is Karen Jones. I'm from the New York
Office of Children and Family Services.

BESSIE
New York! Y'all be lost. Tain't no young'uns chere.

KAREN
Would you be related to a Homer John Meeks?

BESSIE
He wuz my brutter. I hear'd tell he dun died goin' on five
years now.

KAREN
Thank goodness I found you, Ms. Meeks.

BESSIE
Bessie. Ever'one calls me, Mizz Bessie.

KAREN
Miss Bessie, would you mind if I sat down?

BESSIE
Shor. Why you's a nig'ro. Tain't niver met a nig'ro a'fore.
I see'd one once't. You's a perdy thang!

(KAREN sits. BESSIE takes
off her gloves and sits.)

KAREN

Thank you, Miss Bessie. We don't like the term Negro. We prefer black or African American.

BESSIE

Reckon I owes y'all a sorry. Whut kin I duz fer y'all?

KAREN

Well, Miss Bessie, you are one hard woman to find!

BESSIE

Tain't so. I dun lived chere my whole life.

KAREN

Let me start over. I have some important business with you but I would like to be certain you are who I am looking for. Would you have some identification? A birth certificate or driver's liscence?

BESSIE

(pull her wallet off the
Mantle)

Reckon it be rill serious. Dis me.

KAREN

(looks at the ID)

Thank you Miss Bessie. Unfortunately, I am here with some very sad news. I am very sorry your nephew, Martin, and his wife Jane were killed in an auto accident.

BESSIE

I hads a nef-yew an' he died?

KAREN

Yes, ma'am. He was the only child of your brother, Homer.

BESSIE

I niver know'd dat. I's sorry dey got kilt. My brutter dun left us when he turn'd sem'teen an' niver come'd back. Thank y'all fer cumin all dis way ta tells me.

KAREN

Actually, that is only the beginning of my news.

BESSIE

Dey's more?

KAREN

Yes, Miss Bessie. You see Martin and Jane had twins. They are the surviving children.

BESSIE

Y'all sayin' I gots more kin?

KAREN

Yes, ma'am. A boy, Justin and a girl, Jamie.

BESSIE

Well, whut'cha knows 'bout dat? I gots kin folk! I niver know'd dat. Kin!

KAREN

They just turned fourteen-years-old.

BESSIE

Did'ja all say twins?

KAREN

They are both bright, well behaved, loving children. Miss Bessie, you are their last surviving relative.

BESSIE

Dat a fact?

KAREN

Yes. OCSF has been searching for you for six months.

BESSIE

Well, y'all dun foun' me.

KAREN

Miss Bessie, Jamie was in the car and suffered some injuries. Once she was released from the hospital, OCSF was unable to place the twins together. They have been living with different foster families since the accident.

BESSIE

Dem yung'uns tain't livin' tagither?

KAREN

No, Miss Bessie, they are in separate homes.

BESSIE

Tain't right! Tain't right a'tall! Gots'ta has fam'ly. God dun say'd so.

KAREN

Do you have any family?

BESSIE

Jist me an' Cooter since't my ma died.

KAREN

You have no one?

BESSIE

Up chere I ain't 'lone. Gots frien's and neigh'bers an' my church. I duz fine. Tells me 'bout my kin.

KAREN

We have been unsuccessful in finding a family to adopt them or a foster family willing to take them both.

BESSIE

Talk plain.

KAREN

Would be willing to take them in until we can find a suitable family for them?

BESSIE

I takes 'em!

KAREN

You answered awfully fast! This is an enormous responsibility. You should think about it.

BESSIE

No need. God dun say'd in da bible, "If'n some'un don't pro'vide fer his own, 'spesh'ly his own fam'ly, he dun denied his faith an' be worse den a un'bliev'er." Dem chil'drn should be tagither.

KAREN

Still, this will be a huge undertaking. Teenage twins will be a handful. I understand believing in the bible but this is certainly an unusual situation.

BESSIE

Mizz Kar'n. Reckon God dun gots dat all figger'd out. I ain't gots much, but whuts I gots is thars.

KAREN

Oh, thank God! I am so relieved! They are just the nicest children you would ever want to meet. They have been through so much!

BESSIE

Tells me 'bout 'em. Y'all say'd, Janie...

KAREN

Jamie. Jamie is the girl and Justin is the boy.
(handing BESSIE a photo)
Here's a picture of them.

BESSIE

Whee doggies, dey's good lookin' chil'drn. Y'all say'd Jamie wuz hurt. Whut happ'nd?

KAREN

It is just so tragic. Apparently, Martin was driving and fell asleep behind the wheel. He hit another car head on.

BESSIE

Dear Lord!

KAREN

Martin, Jane, and the other driver were killed instantly. Jamie was asleep on the back seat. She suffered some bad facial lacerations. She was quite traumatized. She saw her parents killed and it has taken a toll on her. I'm afraid she hasn't spoken, since the accident. It will take some patience to get her to talk to you.

BESSIE

Dat's terr'ble. I gots da patience a Job. Don'tcha worries none 'bout dat. Whut 'bout da boy?

KAREN

Fortunately, he was staying at a friend's house and wasn't in the car. Justin is very protective of Jamie. In the past six months, they have only seen each other once. Both children are depressed and their school work is suffering.

BESSIE

I makes shor dey gits thar edj-e-cation. We dun gots a bang up school up chere. One a da teachers, she be rill good.

KAREN

Jamie should see a psychiatrist.

BESSIE

Whut dat?

KAREN

It's a doctor who deals with the trauma and the mental aspects of the accident.

BESSIE

Ain't gots no docter like dat up chere. Jist reg'lar docters.

KAREN

That's unfortunate. It will make your job more difficult. You will have to help them get through this. They are likely to act out. It won't be easy!

BESSIE

Whut duz I do fer em? Ain't gots no sper'ience wit no mental prob'lms.

KAREN

Can you read?

BESSIE

Course I kin read! I reads da bible iver night.

KAREN

I will have some books sent to you that might help you deal with the children's trauma. Perhaps we can set you up with some doctors by phone. They can give you insight and help you prepare for the children.

BESSIE

Recon dey's gots lotsa healin' ta duz. I gots luv 'n time.

KAREN

I'm afraid there isn't any money. The family of the woman Martin hit sued the estate. The children lost everything. All those kids have left is each other. There will be some social security for them. Unfortunately the children have bounced around to several homes so it will be awhile before that money finds you.

BESSIE

Like I say'd, dey's kin. I takes care a' 'em. I ain't niver had no yung'uns, but I makes shor dey gits schoolin' an' food an' a warm place ta sleep.

KAREN

Would they each have their own room? That is important to the placement.

BESSIE

Well, I took'd down a wall ta makes my room bigger. Reckon I puts da wall back ta gives dem dey own room. I gits a bed fer Justin soon's I sells sum pelts.

KAREN

We will have to do a background check and there will be some visits by OCSF to make sure there are suitable accommodations for each child, and to be sure the children are safe and well fed. In the meantime, I'll send you those books and set up some phone appointments for you.

BESSIE

Tain't gots no tel-e-phone. Y'all kin calls da post office in Altamont. Ax't fer Mizz Mavis. She be a frien' a' mine. She git me da message.

KAREN

What about phone appointments with the psychiatrist?

BESSIE

I gits ta town ta talk to da doct'er. I be riddy!

(KAREN stands visibly relieved.)

KAREN

Miss Bessie, it is such a pleasure to meet you.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Not many relatives are as open and willing as you are to take in even one child much less two. I'll make the arrangements and will call you once everything's in place.

BESSIE

You gits 'em here an' I duz da rest. Don'tcha worry, I gots kin! I takes care a dem.

KAREN

Thank you again, Miss Bessie. I'm sorry for your loss and dropping them in your lap.

BESSIE

'Round chere we duz fer kin. It gittin' late. I's jist makin' sum vittles. Gots a possum stew 'bout ready. Y'all hung'ry?

KAREN

No! I mean, no thank you. I have a plane to catch. Thank you again, Miss Bessie. Goodbye.

BESSIE

G'bye.

(KAREN exits.)

BESSIE (CONT'D)

God, whut dun jist happ'n? Y'all gots'ta hep me gits it right. Dem yung'uns dun lost ever body. I shorely duzn't wunts ta duz nuf'in wrong. I's axt'in fer yer grace. Thank ye, God. Amen.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING:

Late morning a week later in BESSIE'S shack. The room is clean with homey touches. There's a mason jar with flowers on the table and the mantel. There are bowls of fresh fruit. A hand-stitched quilt is on the couch. There is a pot over the fire and a cross on the wall. There are old family photos on the wall.

AT RISE:

BESSIE is visibly excited as she straightens the room. There is a KNOCK at the door. BESSIE lets out a 'Yippe' and answers it. KAREN stands at the door with JAMIE and JUSTIN. They each carry two nice suitcases. JAMIE and JUSTIN are well dressed. JUSTIN wears his ever-present Giants cap. JAMIE has a large fresh scar on her face that she covers with her hair. She does not make eye contact.

KAREN

Miss Bessie, I'd like you to meet...

BESSIE

Jamie an' Justin! I'm yer Great Aint Bessie. Yer grampa's sister. Y'all kin calls me, G'aint Bessie.

(JAMIE and JUSTIN look inside then to KAREN.)

BESSIE (CONT'D)

Well, don't jist stands thar! Come on in!

(KAREN nudges the kids and they reluctantly enter.)

KAREN

It was a long flight.

BESSIE

I reckon it wuz. Y'all hung'ry? I kin fix ya up wit sum vittles.

(JAMIE and JUSTIN just stare.)

KAREN

Thank you, Miss Bessie, we ate on the plane.

BESSIE

Well, sit a spell. Y'all wunts sum carrot juice er sum blackburry juice? I makes 'em from da foods I grow'd.

KAREN

Home-made blackberry juice sounds delicious.

(KAREN, JUSTIN, and JAMIE put the suitcases down. BESSIE goes to the kitchen and brings back mismatched drinking glasses and a pitcher. KAREN pours.)

BESSIE

Well, let me gits a look at'cha.

(BESSIE goes to JUSTIN and tries to remove his cap. JUSTIN pulls away.)

KAREN

Justin, that's not polite.

(JAMIE nods to JUSTIN. JUSTIN reluctantly takes off his hat.)

BESSIE

I niver know'd I hads iny kin folk. You'sa good lookin'! Why look at dem muscles. Y'all is a right fine lookin' boy! Betcha gits all dem girls a gigglin'.

(JAMIE hides her face and doesn't look up. BESSIE goes to JAMIE and tries to see her face. JUSTIN jumps between them.)

JUSTIN

Jamie's shy. She doesn't want to talk.

BESSIE

Dat's okay, darlin'. Ain't gonna makes y'all duz no talkin' if'n y'all don't wants ta. Far as I's concerned, dey's too much jawin' an' carry'n on inyways. Y'all talks when yer riddy. Justin, why don'tcha put dem parcels in yer rooms. Jamie gots da pink one and you gots da blue.