Celestial Bliss

A Farce in One Act

By
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to those delightful Danish men in central Utah, whose wonderful sense of humor made this possible.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Before the Manifesto which abolished plural marriage among the Mormons, there were many members among the Danish converts who had several wives. The Danes were always quick to see the funny side of things -- and polygamy was no exception. For one thing, more wives meant more mothers-in-law! When the U.S. Government declared plural marriage to be illegal and sent marshals to arrest the men, a great strain was put upon the mixed-up loyalties of the wives, the children, the mothers-in-law, the husbands and even the church officials. The farcical hide-and-go-seek plot of the play is compounded by the hilarious Danish fracture of the newly acquired English language. This is Danish humor at its rural best -- taken from the mouths of their descendants in 1945, who quoted their parents and the gossip of their parents who lived around 1889. The dialect is fun and not hard to master.

About 45 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 w, 1 boy.)

There is no similarity to any real person, living or dead, herein depicted.

PETER (CRUMBS) PETERSON: A middle-aged man known locally as Peter Crumbs, to distinguish him from the many other Peter Petersons. He is a short man with a red, flat face, and flapping ears that trim his otherwise bald head. He is no beauty; but he has a kind face and a sense of duty that makes up for his physical shortcomings. He is forever calling down his wayward self, and gives vent to this duel personality orally -- sometimes to his embarrassment.

STEENY: The first wife, a middle-aged woman.

POLA: The second wife, a skinny woman in her late twenties. She is as ineffectual as a well-done string bean, and has an expression of puzzled guilt.

TREENY: The third wife, a woman with a violent, twitching stutter. She is bright enough, but very homely.

ANNIE: Steeny's mother, a fat woman with a strong personality.

KINNA K'NICK: Treeny's mother, a deaf, old woman who rocks constantly, eternally tearing and sewing rag rugs.

WOODENHEAD: Peter and Pola's son, a 12-year-old boy. His name implies his weakness. His stringy blond hair is stiffly parted in the middle, and his arms and legs seem thrust through and beyond their encasements.

SQEAKY PETERSON: A neighbor, a small, middle-aged man. Known as Squeaky Pete for an obvious reason--his voice. He is a mousy little man with a pasty face and a righteous manner. He aims to make up in angelic obedience for any of his shortcomings; and he fancies that in the afterlife, he will have a body fitting to the importance of his soul.

MARSHAL CLAUSON: US officer, a portly Southern man.

MARSHAL HINKLEY: Local officer, the stool pigeon, of English extraction.

KRISTINE: A beautiful, young Danish immigrant girl, about seventeen.

BISHOP: A middle-aged man.

SETTING

The time is late afternoon three months before the Manifesto-1889. The place is a little town called Ephriam *(otherwise known as "Little Denmark")* in the Territory of Utah.

The action takes place in a typical parlor setting. In the center of the room there is a small round table. On opposite sides of the table are two rocking chairs, exactly alike. The furniture includes a sofa, a dish cupboard, a whatnot, and a potbellied stove. The walls are adorned with religious pictures and cross-stitched pieces. In the rear wall are two deep-set windows, filled with geraniums; and between these windows is a door to the outside, equipped with a screen door. Each sidewall has a door leading to other rooms in the house. The floor is covered with rag rugs, and dozens of crocheted doilies adorn every possible place: the shelves of the cupboard and the whatnot, the backs of the chairs and the sofa, etc. It is the home of Peter Peterson and his three wives.

Spoken Prologue

One of the most amusing games of “cops and robbers” in all history occurred following the passage of the Edmunds “Anti-Polygamy” Act by Congress in 1883, until the pronouncement of the Woodruff Manifesto by the “Mormon” Church in 1889, in which polygamy was officially disbanded.

During this time marshals gathered from wherever the U.S. Government could find them, and descended upon the then Territory of Utah. Each looked for a local stool pigeon to guide him. Their quarry in the little Danish communities sometimes turned out to be the poor, simple immigrant who had hardly a perfect understanding of the law, the language, or the “Mormon” religion. They were ignorant but not without native intelligence. The Ugly Ducklings, as they have been called, formed an ingenious underground to outwit their pursuers, whom they considered to be in league with the Devil. Adding to the confusion of the marshals was the problem of names. In a single community there would be as many as a dozen Ole Olsons or Peter Petersons. To the Danes this was no problem, for they discovered nicknames. Nicknames were hardly acceptable in the dignified and legal U.S. documents which had to be served to summon a miscreant and bring him to trial.

The story of these escapades comes from the mouths of their descendants; and while this particular combination of events did not occur at one time, nor to any particular person, this play is entirely inspired by what actually happened.

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(AT RISE: STEENY, stands in stern authority over young WOODENHEAD who is front and center. POLA, stands at the back wearing her usual expression of puzzled guilt. She cowers constantly under the shelter of TREENY. KINNA K'NICK is rocking and ANNIE TALLER, sits in the opposite rocker.)

STEENY: Who ... iss … papa?
WOODENHEAD: Huh?
STEENY: Who iss your papa!!
WOODENHEAD: *(HE looks terror stricken at HER, and guiltily applies for succor from HIS MOTHER, who doesn't dare to throw him a hint.)* Huh?
STEENY: Voodenhead!! *(She picks up a stick to help remind him.)* Peter Voodenhead! Who iss your papa!
WOODENHEAD: *(Hesitantly.)* He ... he is out in da grain' ry.
STEENY: No! Ach … fe'scrackly! *(Meaning, "This is terrible.")* For fifty times … NO! You are not to say he is in da grain'ry!! Vot you should say?
WOODENHEAD: *(Looking helpless.)* I don' know.
STEENY: Dot's it! "I don't know!" You don't know who is your papa. Ferstaya? Now … Who is your papa?

(HE looks in terror at POLA who tries to mouth the message, "I don't know.")

WOODENHEAD: I don't know.
STEENY: Ach! Dot's gut. Ven da marshals is coming an' saying "Who is your papa?" dot's vot you say ... "I don' know." You don' vant your papa vit his head shaved off sitting in yail vit stripes around mit! *(PETER shakes his head.)* Ve try vonce more. Sister Treeny! Git out vit da duster on. Da Marshal Clauson you is being!

(TREENY darts out the room, and comes back instantly in a riding cape, called a "duster.")

End of Freeview

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