MAN UNDER HER BED

By Agnes Wolf

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Clayton Hill is a convict who's just escaped because he suffers from "classophobia." Mrs. Pulver is a strong-willed, elderly woman who above all cherishes her independence. And no down-on-his-luck-on-the-run convict is going to make her call for help which is the first step to a nursing home. Thrown together, this odd couple creates a laugh riot, especially when Clayton must dress up like a lady to pose as a long-lost cousin at Mrs. Pulver's birthday party AND baby-sit the state trooper's children.

SETTING

The present, wintertime. Mrs. Pulver's kitchen, on a farm somewhere in upstate New York. It is an old-fashioned kitchen with a rocking chair near a wood-burning stove, knick-knack shelves on the walls, a kitchen table and some chairs, and a daybed with a faded quilt. The bed is in the kitchen to save heating costs and work for an individual who has to carry coal and wood by herself. There is a braided area rug on the center of the floor. There are three doors, one SL leading to the outside, one UPS leading to cellar and one SR leading to the rest of the house.

PLAYING TIME: About 30 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(2 m, 4 w, extra ladies)

CLAYTON HILL: An escaped convict of undeterminable age; poorly groomed with poor self-esteem; considers himself a stepchild of fortune.

MRS. PULVER: An elderly lady who cherishes her independence more than comfort and security; speaks her mind freely and is used to getting her way.

LINDA TOMPKINS: A young neighbor; sweet, innocent, totally domesticated by her husband.

BILL TOMPKINS: A state trooper, Linda's husband; takes himself and his job very seriously; friendly and helpful but a male chauvinist.

RUTH: A neighbor.

MRS. KROEGER: Another.

LADIES: *(Any number*.) Attending the party.

PROPS: Boots, wet, holey socks, and a switchblade for Clayton; heeled shoes (wearing) and slippers (under bed) for Mrs. Pulver; gun in holster for Tompkins; long skirt, gray wig and long scarf for Clayton's disguise; knitting; extra chairs for party; big birthday cake; shopping list; cooking pots and coffee pot; pipe; and book.

SFX: Sound of a car motor and door and sound of a board falling.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is late winter afternoon, the light is getting dim; the room is empty. CLAYTON HILL peeks through the outside door, then enters slowly. He can hardly walk; stops in front of the stove. After he has made sure that the room is empty, he stretches and groans happily, as the warmth penetrates him. He realizes that his boots are soaked, and stares at the puddle on the floor they made. Then he takes them off with many moans and groans.)

HILL: I've had it. Twelve inches of snow, uphill, downhill, and them dogs snapping at my heels. Half a mile wadin' through the brook to get rid of them. *(HE moves his bare feet lovingly in front of the fire.)* The poor footsies have had it. I need new ones. Miles through the snow … soaked boots, soaked socks and pants legs, and cold, so cold. Nobody's home, but somebody's livin' here, at least the guy that lit the fire - or is it a gal? *(Sound of a CAR approaching and stopping.)* Oh, darn it! So soon! Where can I hide? *(HE runs around panicky. At last he picks up his boots, socks, and a knife that was hidden in his boots, creeps under the bed, pulling the quilt down to the floor. He cries out in pain.)* Oh, my kidney! My poor busted kidney! Nothin' but shoes to lie on! Ouch! Ouch!

(HE stops "ouching" only after a CAR DOOR is heard opening and shutting. LINDA and MRS. PULVER are heard talking outside the room.)

LINDA: So long, Mrs. Pulver.
MRS. PULVER: So long, Linda, and thank you for the ride.
LINDA: Shall I come in with you?
MRS. PULVER: You mean because of that escaped convict they told about on the radio? Good girl. I'm not afraid, there's nothing to steal in my house. Get home safe, Linda! *(Enters, kicks off HER shabby pumps, wiggles her toes, talking to herself.)* Those high heels are killing me - serves me right: Vanity of vanities!

MRS. PULVER: *(Continued.)* Oh, where did I leave my slippers? Not by the door. Not under the table, either. Must be under my bed. *(After an impatient search, SHE lifts the quilt to look for them. Seeing the MAN, she jumps bolt upright, totters and slumps into her rocking chair.)* Oh land!

(HILL catapults himself from under the bed and stands threatening over HER, a switchblade in his right hand, Mrs. Pulver's slippers in his left.)

HILL: Don't move, or I kill ya! *(HE moves his knife before HER nose. She looks him over from top to toe so critically that he becomes self-conscious about his messy exterior. He drops the slippers.)* There's yer slippers, ma'am.

MRS. PULVER: You'll have to put them on my feet, since you don't allow me to move.

HILL: *(While HE keeps HER covered with the knife in his right hand, he puts the slippers on her feet with his left, then he feels his unshaven face with his free hand.)* Lady, don't try any funny business with me. I'm desperate. Do you hear me? Desperate.

MRS. PULVER: *(After a long look at HIM.)* You must be Clayton Hill, escaped from Calabash Penitentiary day before yesterday. I heard about you over the radio. *(HILL nods sullenly.)* How do you do, Mr. Hill. I'm Mrs. Pulver.

HILL: How do you do. *(HIS fake cockiness runs out of him like air out of a tire, but he tries to sound tough.)* I've got to hide, lady, and I'm warning you. Don't call the cops.

MRS. PULVER: How can I call the police without a telephone?

HILL: And don't yell for help!

MRS. PULVER: *(With dignity.)* Young man, I know better than to do that. If my neighbors heard me scream, they would come to help me. Naturally you would be gone by that time, hiding in the woods; and my good neighbors would say among themselves, this poor old woman has gone out of her mind, we better let her family know about it.

MRS. PULVER: *(Continued.)* And my relatives are waiting for a reason to send me to a home. But I want to live out here in the woods all by myself. I want to see the sun rise, and to feed the birds through the winter. Oh, how I love it out here in the woods! My freedom is the best thing I have.

(HILL feels something happen to him that makes him drop his knife and fall down on his knees before her. SHE is too involved in her little speech to notice the change in him, until she has finally finished and looks at him.)

MRS. PULVER: What's the matter with you, Mr. Hill?

HILL: I want to be free, too, like you. That's all I want. Oh, I want to be free out here in the woods, like you. Please, let me stay with you, please, let me stay here! *(HE buries his head in HER lap, crying aloud.)*

MRS. PULVER: Do you really think you want my company? You make me wonder how it would work out.

HILL: It'll work. I ain't no brute, lady. I had to skip the pen for my health, I didn't do it to aggravate them nice guards. I'd gone nuts between them walls, if I had stayed any longer. Believe me, lady, I'll earn my keep. I'm a country boy who's handy around the house. Please, give me a try. *(A NOISE outside the house is heard, like boards falling over.)* Somebody's comin', where can I hide?

MRS. PULVER: *(Shoving HIM toward the UPS door.)* The cellar, hurry!

(The entrance door is pushed open, MR. TOMPKINS bursts in with his revolver drawn.)

MRS. PULVER: Oh, land!

MR. TOMPKINS: Gee, Mrs. Pulver, excuse me, I didn't want to scare you. But my wife told me she saw the shadow of a man through your window after she left you, and I ran over as fast as I could. These women see a jailbird behind every bush, until we bring him back to his cage.

End of Freeview

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