

Nannie's Hillbilly Christmas

By Hope Bunch

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Ned Crumpet and his family live a poor life in Appalachia, until one day he gets an offer on his land. Suddenly, the family has more money than they know what to do with! So, with a little help from their new financial advisor, the Crumpets buy a fully furnished home in an upscale community. It seemed like all the family's dreams have come true, even though Granny, Ned, young Heathrow, Nellie Rae, and the chickens, aren't warmly welcomed. First, they get a visit from a no-nonsense sheriff's deputy about their unlicensed yard sale, and then some warnings from the president of the property association. As the holidays approach, the family gets a letter from the folks back home, and nostalgia hits hard. That's when the Crumpets decide to hold a big Pig Pickin' Christmas party, just like the ones they used to have back in the hills. But how will the persnickety, condescending neighbors react to the invitation? Well, once you get to know the Crumpets personally, you'll realize they are the kindest, most God-fearing and all-around best neighbors to have!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 - 7 m, 6 - 8 w, 2 flexible)

NED CRUMPET: A widower, head of the Crumpet family, 50s or older.

EVELYN PURDUE, "NANNIE": Ned's feisty little mother-in-law, 60s or older.

NELLIE RAE: Ned's daughter, a country girl at heart, in her late teens or early 20s.

HEATHROW LODENE: Ned's dim-witted nephew, 18-25 years old.

LAYNE HEMMINGWAY: Personal assistant to Mr. Clydesdale, a Vassar alumnus, in her late 20s or older.

MR. WILBURN CLYDESDALE: Neighbor and financial advisor.

MRS. MARGOT CLYDESDALE: Wilburn's wife, she wants the Crumpets to go back where they came from.

NORMAN FISHER: President of the Millerwood Property Owners Association; may double with Basil Beaver.

DEPUTY FANNIE FITCHETT: Sheriff Deputy; may double with Harriet Beaver and Ms. Fitzgerald.

PENELOPE FITZGERALD: (Flexible) Lives a few doors down from the Crumpets.

REV. WOODROW CAMP: Recently widowed preacher who lives in the same subdivision at the Crumpets, 60s or older.

MRS. AUGUSTA JACKSON: Heathrow's principal at Millerwood Prep School, a little stuffy.

MIKE PATTON: Newspaper photographer, in his early 20s.

COUSIN FURL LODENE: Mother of Heathrow, a little more sophisticated than the Crumpets, 45-50.

DR. GATEWOOD: (Flexible) Expert from the Nashville Genealogical Society.

HARRIET BEAVER: Miss Layne's mother, 50-60s.

BASIL BEAVER: Miss Layne's father, 50-60s.

SETTING

All action takes place in the parlor of the Crumpet mansion in Millerwood, Tennessee. The room is decorated with expensive décor. Seating for eight will be required for scenes 1-4, and seating for thirteen will be required for the last three scenes. You may increase the seating capacity with folding chairs for the final scenes.

The front door to the home is located DSR and a doorway to the upstairs is located between USR and USC. A doorway to the offstage kitchen is USL and a doorway to the offstage "fancy eating room" is located DSL. A love seat and two side chairs are CSR. A sofa table is directly behind the love seat. Magazines, a box of tissues and a house phone are on the sofa table. Two rocking chairs sit side by side CSL. A small console table and a podium (optional) are against the wall between USL and DSL. A small dining table, holding a decorative lamp or floral arrangement, and two chairs are USC.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: In the parlor of the Crumpet home, the fundraiser, about three weeks before Christmas.

Scene 2: In the parlor of the Crumpet home, homesickness.

Scene 3: In the parlor, the following day, the assignment.

Scene 4: In the parlor, mid-December, a new friend drops by.

ACT II

Scene 1: In the parlor, December 23rd, the day of the Christmas Pig Pickin'.

Scene 2: In the parlor, December 23rd, the gift exchange.

Scene 3: In the parlor, December 23rd, more guests arrive.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Nannie is standing near the DSR door with a clipboard and a pencil in her hand and cardboard boxes at her feet. The boxes hold small items wrapped in brown paper or cloth bags and include a metal cash box. Leaning against the DSR wall are hand-painted signs that read: Soap and Warshin Powder 75 cent; Muskrat Jerky 75 cent apiece; Goat Milk one dollar; Eggs two dollars a dozun; and Hand Karved Toyz three dollars a set. The signs are attached to small wooden posts that are pointed at the bottom.)

HEATHROW: *(Enters from USL, carrying a basket of eggs.)* I got the eggs from Nellie Rae's chickens. Where is she at? I thought she was s'possed to be helpin' with the sale.

NANNIE: She's gone lookin' for Bessie. She musta broke outta the fence again.

NED: *(Enters from USL, carrying hand-carved toys.)* Where you want me to put these toys, Nannie?

NANNIE: Set them beside the box of soap and the warshin' powder. Somebody's sure to snatch them up, Ned. Them trucks will make a nice Christmas gift for some little feller.

HEATHROW: I'd like to learn whittlin', Uncle Ned. You think you could teach me?

NED: I'm not sure that's a good idea, Heathrow.

NANNIE: Don't you 'member cousin Lester nearly cut his thumb off when he was whittlin' himself a pipe?

NED: Yeah, you betta leave whittlin' alone.

NANNIE: Besides, we got big plans for you, boy.

NED: That's right, with that big powerful brain of yours, your edgycation gotta come first.

NANNIE: You gonna be the first one in the family to git a real high school diplomee'.

HEATHROW: I'm tryin', Nannie. I already done worked myself up to the fifth grade.

NANNIE: And it only took you two years in each grade.

HEATHROW: 'Cept for fourth grade. That one was real hard. Took me three years.

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NED: Now, don't forget. Mr. Clydesdale said he was gonna bring that teacher lady over this mornin' to talk to us 'bout getting you in that fancy privite school.

NANNIE: He said it was the best school in the county. I hear they got classes all the way through 8th grade!

NED: Well, diddly diddly. Ain't that sumthin'?

NELLIE RAE: *(Bursts through DSR door, pulling a goat on a leash or carrying a live chicken or rabbit in her arm, or in a cage. You may also substitute a life-like puppet.)* You gotta stop runnin' away like that, Bessie. You gonna git yerself in trouble.

NANNIE: Where'd you find her this time?

NELLIE RAE: She was clean over to Ms. Clydesdale's house. She likes to eat them little yeller pears that done fell on the ground.

NED: I'm glad she didn't get no further'n next door. You go on now, Nellie Rae, and put her back in the pen. We got work to do.

NELLIE RAE: Yes, sir, Pa. Come on, Bessie. *(Leads goat as they cross to USL exit.)*

NED: So, Nannie, you decided where you want to put the rest o' these boxes?

HEATHROW: I done moved all the chairs off the porch. There's more room out there now.

NANNIE: Let's see. We got all the selling prices wrote down on them signs. Heathrow, take 'em on outside and stick 'em in front o' the hedge so ever'body can see that we is havin' a sale.

HEATHROW: Yes, ma'am. *(Exits DSR with signs in hand.)*

NED: *(Removes envelope from his pocket.)* Here's the change you wanted. Miss Layne brung it over yesterdy. Whar you want me to put it?

NANNIE: The cash box is right thar by the soap.

(NED puts the money in the cash box. Beat.)

HEATHROW: *(Re-enters from DSR exit.)* Them signs is all done.

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NELLIE RAE: *(Re-enters from USL.)* Bessie's back in the pen. What you want me to do, Nannie?

NANNIE: You and me is gonna take the first turn at the sale. You help carry things to people's cars and I'll handle the money.

HEATHROW: How much money you hoping to raise at this here sale?

NANNIE: If we sell everythin' we got, we should clear near forty-five dollars.

NED: Heathrow, you and me gonna take over at the sale in the afternoon.

NANNIE: *(Snickers.)* If thar's anythin' left!

HEATHROW: I made ten bags of chewy muskrat jerky. Lemme see, if we sell every bag fer seventy-five cent, we'll have ...at least three or four dollars!

(NELLIE RAE counts on her fingers and shakes her head.)

NANNIE: *(Cuts her eye at NED.)* Ned, you better handle the money.

NED: *(Nods.)* That's a good idea.

NANNIE: I hope these city women will know a good bar of soap and quality warshin' powders when they see it. There's nothing like a strong lye soap to get the stains out.

NELLIE RAE: You sho did make a lot of it. That must be three dozen cakes o' soap in them little bags.

NED: When we was livin' back in the hills, your Nannie sold every piece of soap she made at the church Christmas fundraiser. Them Laurel Fork church ladies done sent money to the children's home as long as I can remember.

NANNIE: I reckon it's been near on to 45 years. Yes, indeed, 'long about the last week of November, the women in the church brung their cakes, cookies and pies fer the sale. Some brung eggs, pickles or jelly but I always brung my homemade cleaning supplies. *(Proudly picks up a basket of soaps.)* My soap and heavy-duty warshin' powder was known far and wide. And every penny we got from the sale was sent to the Children's Home Society.

NELLIE RAE: You miss doin' that, don't' ya, Nannie?

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NANNIE: I sure do, child. I miss everything about Laurel Fork, 'specially spendin' time at Christmas with my friends at the church.

HEATHROW: Instead of doin' all this work, why don't we jest send them orphans some money?

NED: Boy, you is treading on treacherous waters right now.

HEATHROW: But Mr. Clydesdale says we got milleyuns of dollars in his bank.

NELLIE RAE: I bet I know why. Nannie tole me, when you do sumthin' fer sumbody else with yer own two hands, it makes you feel all good inside.

NANNIE: You hit the nail on the head, child. And since I cain't be heppin' with the sale in Laurel Fork, I'm havin' my own sale, right here. It's not the same ...but it's the best I can do. I can still send a Christmas donation to the children's home.

NED: I got an idea. After this here sale is all over, why don't I ask Miss Layne to send them children some of the money we got in Mr. Clydesdale's bank?

NANNIE: Good idea, Ned!

(SFX: knock at the DSR door.)

NANNIE: *(Cont'd.)* Maybe that's our first customer. Reckon they cain't wait fer us to open.

(NELLIE RAE crosses and opens door for the CLYDESDALES and MRS. JACKSON.)

NELLIE RAE: Well, look who's here. It's Mr. and Mrs. Clydesdale.

NED: *(Crosses to door.)* Come on in!

MR. CLYDESDALE: May I introduce Mrs. Augusta Jackson, the headmistress at Millerwood Academy.

NED: Of course you can, Mr. Clydesdale. Go right ahead.

MR. CLYDESDALE: Well then, ...this is Mrs. Augusta Jackson, the headmistress of Millerwood Academy. Mrs. Jackson is also one of my wife's personal friends.

MRS. JACKSON: I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Crumpet.

NED: How do, ma'am. *(Tips his hat.)*

MRS. CLYDESDALE: Augusta, this is Mr. Crumpet's daughter, Nellie Rae, and his mother-in-law, Evelyn Purdue. And this young man is Heathrow Lodene.

(NANNIE, NELLIE RAE, and HEATHROW ad lib "Nice to meet you." "Hello." etc.)

NED: So you're a teacher at the fancy school Mr. Clydesdale was tellin' me about?

MRS. JACKSON: Actually, I'm the headmistress of the academy. It's the same as being the principal.

NED: Mighty nice of you to drop by. We was hoping to get my nephew back in school. He's in the fifth grade.

MRS. CLYDESDALE: Excuse me, Mr. Crumpet. If you don't mind me asking, what's all the debris on the front porch? It really should be removed as quickly as possible.

MR. CLYDESDALE: I think it's pretty clear, Margot. The Crumpets are having a yard sale. *(Whispers to MARGOT.)* MYOB!

MRS. CLYDESDALE: But it's unsightly! It looks like trash to me!

NED: Oh, no, ma'am. That's just some pasteboard boxes we was using to carry ever'thin outside fer the sale.

NANNIE: *(To MRS. CLYDESDALE.)* We sellin' some of our home goods to raise money for the children's home. Can I interest you in some of my soap or some warshin' powders? Gits out even the werst stains!

HEATHROW: *(Crosses to MRS. CLYDESDALE.)* And I made some chewy muskrat jerky. I know it's hard fer old folks to chew...

(MRS. CLYDESDALE opens her mouth in shock. HEATHROW looks and then points at her mouth.)

HEATHROW: *(Cont'd.)* ...but it looks like you got pertynear all yer teeth.

(SHE is aghast.)

NELLIE RAE: We got some fresh chicken eggs too.

MRS. CLYDESDALE: (*Bristles.*) I don't want your soap or your muskrat... or your chicken eggs! *What I want* is for you to remove that trash (*Points to DSR door.*) from your front porch! ...It's an eyesore! A blemish on the community!

MR. CLYDESDALE: Margot! There's no need to speak to our friends this way!

MRS. CLYDESDALE: These people might be *your* friends, Wilburn, but I don't have to stay here. (*Crosses to the DSR door and waits.*) Augusta, come along.

NED: (*Crosses to MRS. JACKSON.*) There's no need to rush off jest yet, ma'am. We ain't talked about my nephew's schooling.

MRS. JACKSON: (*Looks back at MRS. CLYDESDALE.*) Mr. Crumpet, I'm not sure your student would be a good fit for Millerwood Academy. You see, our students come from the wealthiest families in Tennessee. The socially elite. Families with *old money*.

NED: If money's what you're worried about, we got at least a milleyun dollars over in Mr. Clydesdale's bank.

MR. CLYDESDALE: Several millions of dollars, as a matter of fact.

MRS. CLYDESDALE: Augusta! Don't listen to him. All he cares about is that bank!

MR. CLYDESDALE: (*Crosses to face AUGUSTA.*) Madam, may I remind you who holds the mortgage on your academy? And your beach home on Old Hickory Lake?

MRS. JACKSON: (*Hesitates.*) I think maybe you should go on ahead, Margot. I'll catch up with you later.

MRS. CLYDESDALE: (*Huffs and blows.*) Well, I never! (*Exits.*)

MRS. JACKSON: Mr. Crumpet, I would very much like to meet the young man who wants to attend my academy.

NELLIE RAE: But Ms. Jackson, he's been standin' right here the whole time.

(*HEATHROW is vigorously waving and grinning at MRS. JACKSON.*)

MRS. JACKSON: This young man wants to attend Millerwood Academy? But our school only goes through the eighth grade. He must be at least twenty!

HEATHROW: Oh, no ma'am. I'm only nineteen. (*Proudly.*) And I already got passed to the fifth grade.

MRS. JACKSON: You're nineteen ...and in the fifth grade?

HEATHROW: Yes, ma'am. Started first grade when I was six. I moved up a grade ever' so often. I was working my way through fifth grade back home when we moved.

MRS. JACKSON: And you want to attend Millerwood Academy? But, young man, why Millerwood?

HEATHROW: It's like this: Uncle Ned tried to get me in that big school down the road a piece, but they wouldn't let me in.

NED: They said he was too big for the fifth grade and couldn't read and cipher good enough to git into high school.

MR. CLYDESDALE: That's why I suggested he should attend your institution... where he could receive a high quality, *individualized* education.

NANNIE: His ma sent Heathrow here to live with us, so he could finish his schoolin'. He'll be the first one in the family to get a real book-learnin' diploma.

NED: And it *would* make us right proud. You see, Ms. Jackson, the rest of us jest learnt to read and write at the kitchen table...what little bit our ma could learn us.

HEATHROW: My ma is gonna be right upset if I haf to tell her that I cain't go to school because I'm too big and too dumb.

MR. CLYDESDALE: Won't you reconsider, Augusta? You can see how much the boy wants to go to school.

(*SHE shakes her head no. Beat.*)

MR. CLYDESDALE: (*Cont'd.*) How about if we were to pay 200% of the customary tuition?

MRS. JACKSON: Ah... 200%? I don't know, Wilburn, I'd have to think about it.

MR. CLYDESDALE: 200% ...and I'll make a sizeable donation to the new gymnasium fund.

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MRS. JACKSON: Oh, alright, Wilburn. You drive a hard bargain. Have him at the school tomorrow morning at 8:30 sharp. Black trousers, white shirt and black shoes. And no blue jeans and certainly no belts made out of rope. Understood?

MR. CLYDESDALE: Understood. (*Shakes HEATHROW's hand.*) Congratulations, Heathrow, you're the newest fifth-grade student at Millerwood Academy!

HEATHROW: Yeehaw! (*Picks MR. CLYDESDALE up off the floor or hugs him tightly.*) I'm going back to school!

(*MR. CLYDESDALE immediately grabs his back.*)

NANNIE: Furl is gonna be so happy!

MRS. JACKSON: I think I should be on my way. It was nice meeting all of you. (*Shakes NED's hand, crosses to DSR exit.*) I'll see you at school tomorrow, Heathrow.

HEATHROW: Yes, ma'am! (*Follows MRS. JACKSON to door; she exits.*)

MR. CLYDESDALE: (*To NED. Still holding his back.*) I'm glad that all worked out, Mr. Crumpet. I'll have Miss Layne come by in the morning to drive Heathrow to school. Have him dressed and ready to go by 8 a.m. Well, I need to be getting home.

NANNIE: (*Crosses to MR. CLYDESDALE.*) Thank you fer what you did... fer getting Heathrow enrolled in that school.

MR. CLYDESDALE: I'm just glad I could help, Nannie. Goodbye for now. (*Hobbles to DSR door and exits.*)

NED: Well, diddly, diddly! I had a feeling everythin was gonna work out.

NANNIE: Heathrow, go git them black boots outta yer closet. We gonna need to—

(*Interrupted by SFX: knock at the DSR door.*)

HEATHROW: I'll git it. Maybe Mrs. Jackson fergot something.

(*HEATHROW opens the door and allows DEPUTY FITCHETT to enter.*)

DEPUTY FITCHETT: *(In a serious tone.)* Good day to you, sir. My name is Deputy Fannie Farmer Fitchett with the Davidson County Sheriff's Department. Are you the owner of the house?

HEATHROW: I don't rightly know. Which house is you talkin' about?

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Don't get cute with me, cowboy.

HEATHROW: My name's Heathrow. Thar ain't nobody here named cowboy, ma'am.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Look, mister, I got backup in the squad car. Do I need to call them?

HEATHROW: Well, golly, I don't know, but you kin use our tellyphone if you want to. *(Points to the phone.)*

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Look, mister, I'm going to give you *one more chance* to cooperate before I write you up for a Section 1510, Obstruction of Justice. Now, tell me *who* owns this house.

HEATHROW: Oh, that's an easy question. My Uncle Ned owns this house. That's him right over yonder. *(Points to NED.)*

NED: *(Crosses to DEPUTY.)* Howdy, ma'am. *(Tips his hat.)* Can I hep you with somethin'?

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Looks like you're having a yard sale on your front porch. I need to see the permit you purchased that allows you to conduct said event.

NANNIE: *(Crosses to join the conversation.)* That ain't no ordinary yard sale, miss. That there's a church fundraiser. We're raising money fer the Children's Home Society back home.

NELLIE RAE: It's charity work. We was selling things that we made with our own two hands.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: That's fine then, ladies. Just show me a copy of the paperwork authorizing you to conduct a church fundraiser within the limits of Davidson County.

NANNIE: We ain't got no paperwork. All we got is the home goods that we made fer the sale. *(Picks up a bag of soap.)* I bet you git stains on that fancy unyform you is wearin'. I'll be happy to give you a discount on my lye soap and warshin' powders.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Ma'am, are you trying to bribe an officer of the law?

NANNIE: I was jest offerin' you a neighborly discount... you ain't gotta buy none if you don't want to.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: So, Mr. Crumpet, do you, or do you not have a permit for this sale?

NED: Well, no, ma'am. But we're law-abiding citizens. We didn't know we had to git a permit for a little church fundraiser.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Let me get this straight: you live in *this* house, in *this* neighborhood, and you had to have a fundraiser to raise money for a bunch of orphans? Who are you? Some kind of bunko artists, trying to swindle people out of their hard-earned money?

NANNIE: We wouldn't cheat nobody if our life depended on it! We was selling quality products at a reasonable price.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Alright then, how much have you sold?

NANNIE: We ain't sold nothin' yet. We had jest finished putting the fer sale signs in the yard when Mr. and Mrs. Clydesdale come fer a visit. They brought Heathrow's new principal over here.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: You're telling me that you haven't sold any of your products?

NED: Narry a one.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: In that case, I'll just let you off with a warning. But I am gonna have to shut you down. You can't have a yard sale in this county without a permit. County ordinance.

NANNIE: You gonna shut us down? We was jest tryin' to help the orphans.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Not my problem, madam.

NELLIE RAE: After all the work we done? We cain't have the sale?

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Not unless you folks want to be served with a ticket for operating a yard sale without a permit. The civil penalty is \$175.00... and it goes on your permanent record.

NED: We ain't lookin' to cause no trouble.

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DEPUTY FITCHETT: Glad to hear it, Mr. Crumpet. I'll need you to remove those signs immediately.

NED: Yes, ma'am. We'll git right on it.

DEPUTY FITCHETT: Well then, I will be on my way.

(SHE exits DSR, the FAMILY stares blankly at each other. Beat.)

NED: *(Crosses to NANNIE.)* I'm real sorry, Nannie. I know you had your heart set on havin' this sale.

HEATHROW: What we gonna do with all this stuff?

NANNIE: I reckon you and Nellie Rae better start movin' all the goods into the storage room. *(THEY cross to the boxes.) (Pitifully, to NED.)* I shoulda knowed better...and I shoulda knowed better than to move away from the hills. This high-dollar town ain't no place for an old grandma from the hills of southwest Virginny.

(SFX: Knock on the DSR door.)

HEATHROW: I bet somebody done seen the signs and they want to buy somethin'.

NELLIE RAE: I'll git the door.

(Opens door to reveal NORMAN FISHER.)

NELLIE RAE: *(Cont'd.)* Hello, mister. I hope you ain't here to buy nothin' 'cuz we jest got shut down.

NORMAN FISHER: No, miss. I'm not here to buy anything. I'm lookin' for *(Looks at a note card.)* a Mr. Ned Crumpet. Is he here?

NED: *(Crosses to NORMAN.)* My name's Ned Crumpet. How can I help you?

(NELLIE RAE crosses to NANNIE.)

NORMAN: Well, sir, my name is Norman Fisher and I'm the president of the Millerwood Property Owners Association.

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