

MOXIE

One-Act Play

CAST

A teenage boy.

The boy's father.

A woman, in her thirties.

A man in his thirties.

SET

A country roadside fruit stand with several crates of apples. A counter, a stool, a cooler for soft drinks, a cash box, some paper bags and shade for the apples. A hand-painted sign says *Baxter's Fruit Stand*.

The counter, stool, cooler and apples are stage left. The center of the stage is open. Offstage, stage right, is the unseen country highway.

TIME

1950s, rural America.

MOXIE

At rise, the boy – in jeans, short-sleeve shirt, wearing a baseball cap – is center stage playing a one-man pantomime baseball game: swinging the bat, bunting, calling out phrases like, “It’s a long drive” and “off the wall.” This how he spends Saturdays, working at the family fruit stand on a lonely stretch of country road, but wishing he were someplace else.

Suddenly, the sound of an approaching car . . . Boy looks up offstage right. Sound of unseen car braking to a stop. Boy retreats to the stool, waits, watches. Sound of car doors opening, closing. After a beat man and woman enter stage right, pause, look around . . .

The man is Hollywood chic, 1950s: V-neck shirt, khaki pants, white-buck shoes and aviator glasses which he will take off, put on, and otherwise play with for effect. Twisted loosely around his open neck is a colorful bandana.

The woman, her face hidden behind dark glasses and a kerchief pulled tight over her hair, is holding an empty paper cup.

Windblown from their convertible ride, the two take a moment to reconstitute themselves. The man stretches, does a little shadow boxing and runs a comb through his hair. The woman undoes her kerchief, shakes out her hair and tries to inflict order upon it with a brush.

MAN: *(Looking at the boy for the first time, calls over . . .)* Hey, kiddo, what’s to drink?

BOY: *(Gesturing at cooler)* Soda pop.

MAN: No whiskey?

BOY: Nope.

MAN: Beer?

BOY: Nope.

MAN: What kind of place is this?

BOY: A fruit stand

MAN: Just soda pop?

BOY: Yup.

The man and woman saunter over to the counter. As the man lifts the hinged top of the cooler, he and the woman take off their dark glasses and look in.

WOMAN: (*Looking up*) No coke?

BOY: Not 'til Tuesday. All we got left is what's there: cream soda, root beer and Moxie.

The man pulls a pint bottle of whiskey out of his back pocket, unscrews the top, takes a swig then offers the bottle to the boy . . .

BOY: No thanks.

MAN: (*Still extending the bottle*) A real man takes it straight.

BOY: (*Shakes his head and gestures "no"*)

MAN: Ah, come on, kid. It's Saturday.

WOMAN: Leave him alone.

MAN: I won't tell your daddy.

WOMAN: Just because you're a drunk, don't make him one, too.

MAN: (*With an exaggerated shrug*) Okay, okay. (*Takes another swig from the bottle. Pointing at the woman's empty cup . . .*) She's gotta mix it with something. If it's not Coke, what's it going to be?"

BOY: How about Moxie?

WOMAN: *Moxie?* Who ever heard of mixing whiskey with Moxie?"

MAN: (*Grandly*) Hey . . . I thought you said we were off on an adventure. Out to have some fun. (*Reaches in and takes out a Moxie*) How much?

BOY: Five cents.

MAN: (*Puts quarter on the counter. When boy puts the change on the counter, grandly*) Keep it.

WOMAN: (*To the boy*) He's a big spender with other people's money.

MAN: (*Opens Moxie, pours some into the woman's cup and adds some whiskey from the bottle . . .*)

WOMAN: (*Swirls it around, takes a sip; with approval . . .*) It'll do.

MAN: (*Takes another swig from the bottle, then, slightly behind the woman so she can't see, teasingly offers the bottle to the boy again.*)

BOY: (*Shakes his head "no"*)

WOMAN: (*Wandering around, looking; gesturing admiringly*) This your place?

BOY: My family's.

WOMAN: (*Pointing at the Baxter Fruit Stand sign*) You a Baxter?

BOY: Yeah.

WOMAN: (*Gesturing toward unseen house*) You live up there?

BOY: Yeah.

WOMAN: I see you got electricity.

BOY: We do now.

WOMAN: (*Turning to man*) I could live in a place like this.

MAN: (*Takes another swig from the bottle and harrumphs*)

WOMAN: What's so funny?

MAN: You.

WOMAN: What about me?

MAN: You couldn't be happy in a place like this for five minutes.

WOMAN: (*Hurt*) Why do you say that?

MAN: (*Scanning the landscape with a cupped palm over his eyes . . .*) I don't see any department stores, do you?

WOMAN: (*Indignantly*) Hey, I grew up in a place like this.

MAN: Well, you don't live in a place like this now, sweetheart. (*To the boy*) Is there even a town around here?"

BOY: Elmsford.

MAN: Where that?

BOY: (*Gesturing*) Eight miles down the road.

MAN: What's there?

BOY: Lots of things.

MAN: Like what?

BOY: They got an A & P . . .

MAN: (*With exaggeration*) Wow.

BOY: A five and dime . . .

MAN: (*Clutching his chest*) Oh my god, a five and dime . . .

BOY: A butcher shop . . . a bakery . . . a Montgomery Ward . . . and there's a drive-in theater . . .

MAN: (*Interrupting*) *Hold it right there!* You hear that, Gloria? If you lived here you could shop at Montgomery Ward's, get your nails done at the butcher shop and, on Saturday night, you could go to the drive-in movie theater.

BOY: (*Enthusiastically*) That's where we're going tonight. They got two Tarzan movies.

MAN: (*Feigning excitement*) Are you listening, Gloria?" Not *one* Tarzan movie. *Two*.

WOMAN: (*To the man*) You know something . . . You're just a goddamn jerk. (*Handing the man a paper bag*) It's time for you to do something useful. Go get us some apples.

MAN: (*Another exaggerated look. Bag in one hand, whiskey bottle in the other, the man sashays theatrically over to the where the apples are on display, upstage, in crates.*)

WOMAN: (*To the boy, derisively*) Look at him. He's been in a couple of B movies and he thinks he's Clark Gable.

MAN: Errol Flynn, please . . .

WOMAN: (*To the man, with contempt*) You *wish* Errol Flynn. (*To the boy*) Do you know who Errol Flynn is?

BOY: *The Mark of Zorro.*

MAN: (*Fencing suddenly with an imaginary sword*)

WOMAN: (*To the man*) Hey, Errol Flynn has a *real* sword, and he knows how to use it.

MAN: You ought to know.

WOMAN: I do know. And let me tell you something else I know. Errol Flynn's a real man. Not a switch hitter.

MAN: Careful . . .

WOMAN: (*Turning to boy*) You're not a switch hitter are you?

BOY: Not me. (*Gesturing at the bat*) I bat right handed.

MAN: Ease up, Gloria. You're talking to a child.

WOMAN: I'm not *talking* to a child. I *live* with a child. I'm talking to a big strong farm boy. (*To the boy*) Isn't that right?

BOY: Right.

WOMAN: He's like the boys I grew up with. Boys with big swords who knew how to use them.

MAN: Would you stop that . . .

WOMAN: (*To the boy*) I'll bet you can handle a sword.

BOY: (*Excitedly*) I have a sword from the Civil War.

WOMAN: Hear that? He's got one of those *big* Civil War swords.

MAN: (*To the boy*) Don't listen to her.

WOMAN: Just get the goddamn apples.

MAN: (*Shrugs, takes another swig from the bottle, touches up his hair with a comb and begins putting apples into a bag.*)

WOMAN: (*To the boy*) He does what I want. And you know why . . . ?

BOY: Why?

WOMAN: Because I pay the bills, that's why. (*Pause; then calling over to the man*) Isn't that true?

MAN: Isn't what true, dearie?

WOMAN: Isn't it true that I pay the bills?

MAN: Anything you say, dearie.

WOMAN: Well that's what I'm saying.

BOY: (*To woman, gesturing at man*) Was he really in the movies?

WOMAN: (*Laughs*) Parts so small if you blink you'll miss him.

Man sashays back to the counter with bag of apples and puts it on the counter. Woman holds out empty cup and man pours in whiskey, emptying the bottle with an exaggerated squeeze. Woman pours in Moxie.

MAN: (*Trying unsuccessfully to suck one more drop out of the bottle; then, displaying the empty bottle, theatrically . . .*) We got a problem here, Gloria.

WOMAN: (*In the man's face*) The only problem we got here is you. Go wait out in the car.

MAN: (*Hurt*) What are you going to do?

WOMAN: (*Interrupting*) Just go wait in the car and don't worry about it.

The woman and the boy watch the man leave. On the way out he drops the empty whiskey bottle into one of the apple boxes, then sashays across center stage, pausing once to do a quick bit of Errol Flynn swordplay. Exits stage right to Buick.

WOMAN: (*Laughs*) I don't know how I ever got involved with the likes of him. But he's harmless enough.

BOY: (*Awestruck*) Do you really know Errol Flynn?

WOMAN: Everyone in Hollywood knows Errol Flynn.

BOY: You've talked to him?

WOMAN: A lot more than that, honey.

BOY: Can you see him just out walking around?

WOMAN: (*Laughs*) Errol doesn't *walk* around. Errol *rides* around. Rides around looking pretty. (*Pause*) The truth of it is, Errol's a drunk. A drunk and a fruitcake. (*Pause; tone*) Don't let that stuff you see on the screen fool you. That's all just make-believe. (*Pause; admiringly*) I wasn't kidding when I said I grew up in a place like this. No electricity until I was in high school. An outhouse. But it was good, honest, living. Real people, real food, real times, real smells . . . You want to know something . . .

BOY: What . . . ?

WOMAN: (*Gesturing*) You got a nice thing going here. A family business. Apples. Fresh air. Plenty of space. No bums begging for money. Don't ever forget that. Hollywood's a sewer and a viper pit.

BOY: It is?

WOMAN: That exactly what it is. (*Pause*) What do I owe you for the apples, pretty boy?

BOY: (*Looking in the bag and counting*) Ten cents.

WOMAN: (*Takes out a five-dollar bill and puts it on the counter.*)

BOY: (*Picking it up; emphatically*) I can't change five dollars.

WOMAN: I'm not looking for change, honey. That five is for you. And I mean *for you*. (*Putting a dime on the counter . . .*) Here. That's for the apples.

BOY: (*Looking at the five-dollar bill*) That's a lot of money . . .

WOMAN: Consider it a down payment on something, and we don't know what that is yet. But, I'll be back someday and we'll work it out then. Is that okay with you?

BOY: Sure.

WOMAN: We'd make a nice team, you and me.

BOY: (*Laughs . . .*)

WOMAN: I'm serious. And, here I am ready to team up with you and I don't even know your name.

BOY: Ben. Ben Baxter.

WOMAN: Gloria Parker.

She extends her hand. They shake; then, without warning, woman grabs boy and kisses him. Disengaging, she re-ties her kerchief, picks up

the bag of apples and starts across stage to Buick. Stunned, holding the five-dollar bill, the boy watches. Pausing just before exiting, the woman turns . . .

WOMAN: If you ever get to Hollywood, sweetheart, look me up. Mark Twain Hotel. Everybody knows where that is. Or just ask for Gloria Parker. People know me and they know where I live . . .

BOY: Okay.

WOMAN: Got that name straight now?

BOY: Gloria Parker.

WOMAN: Right. We'll go take Errol to lunch. How about that?

BOY: Great . . . And thanks for the money.

WOMAN: You're worth every penny of it, sweetheart.

She exits.

Hearing the car start, the boy moves quickly across stage and watches as car zooms away.

Boy returns to stool, sits down, takes off one of his shoes, folds the five-dollar bill, puts it in the shoe, puts shoe back, picks up the bat and is about to resume the "game" when the boy's weary, deadpan, father – appropriately dressed in farm clothes – enters stage left.

DAD: (*Checking the apple boxes*) Looks like I left it this morning.

BOY: Noe many cars, dad.

DAD: (*Removing the empty whiskey bottle from a box of apples*) What's this? You drinking on the job now?

BOY: That guy must have left it.

DAD: What guy?

BOY: (*Enthusiastically*) Some guy from Hollywood who's been in the movies. He just left.

DAD: *What?*

BOY: Yeah. He was with a woman who knows Errol Flynn.

DAD: *(Pause)* The actor?

BOY: Yeah.

DAD: *(With contempt)* That's ridiculous. *(Pausing to smell boy's breath)* There's nothing but kooks driving around these days.

BOY: *(Emphatically)* They were here, dad, I'm telling you. In a '48 Buick convertible with push-button windows and California license plates. They were from Hollywood.

DAD: Nobody from Hollywood ever drove down this road, even if they were lost.

BOY: The lady said Errol Flynn was a drunk and a fruitcake.

DAD: *(Pause)* A what?

BOY: A drunk and a fruitcake. And she said Hollywood was a sewer and a viper pit.

DAD: Listen and listen up good, son. There's lots of kooks riding around these days, and you shouldn't be paying attention to what they say. *(Picks up an apple and tests it for firmness. Tossing the apple away . . .)* They hate this weather. *(Opens cash box, looks . . .)* That's it?

BOY: *(Nods)* Dad, I'm telling ya, these people were from Hollywood.

DAD: *(Counting)* A dollar sixty-five . . .

BOY: That's it, dad.

DAD: *(Takes 50 cents and gives it to the boy)* Here. I should just close this place down.

BOY: *(Putting money into his pocket)* What about the apples?

DAD: The hell with 'em. No one comes by here anymore. *(Gesturing)* Not since the built the new road. *(Gesturing toward boxes)* Come on, let's get these into the pickup.

As they pick up the boxes and start off-stage, boy following man, their backs to the audience . . .

BOY: Hey, dad . . .

DAD: *(Turning)* What?

BOY: What's a fruitcake?

DAD: (*Hesitation*) Something you eat at Christmas.

BOY: Oh.

Curtain