

Secret Life Under the Stairs

A one-act play for Young Audiences

By Kris Knutsen

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com

Cast Of Characters

CATCH - Boy: age 10, brother to Field, fraternal twin.
FIELD - Girl: age 10, sister to Catch, fraternal twin.
BIZZY - Boy: age 11, friend of Catch and Field
LU - Girl: age 10, new in town.

Cast Notes

The play can be performed by either adults or children.

Setting

The play is intended to be produced simply, with a backdrop or screen that suggests the interior and exterior of an old storage shed. The height of the panels should grow to give the outline of steps. A empty doorway in the panel of the wall could be utilized for entrances and exits, and also to "upstairs". Various sizes of wooden crates are positioned around the space for staging and reveals.

Production Notes

Indian Leg Wrestling is when two people lay on their backs, with one knee bent and that foot on the floor and the other leg in the air, locked ankles with the opponent. The winner is the one who can push the other leg down, often flipping over the opponent.

Death Jar: The jar should look fairly realistic and gross. The mess it makes can be contained by laying down a tattered blanket or something appropriate to the setting.

A backdrop suggests the wall of a basement stairway. Crates of weathered wood stack up against the wall and stagger the space. One particularly large crate lies central and upside down. CATCH and FIELD enter from opposite sides of the wall. CATCH is the boy half of a set of 10 year old fraternal twins, he tosses a ball with physical, frenetic energy. FIELD, his 10 year old girl counterpart, is writing in a journal with a quiet air of wisdom/scheming. He knocks the book out of her hand with his ball.

CATCH

Nobody wants to know what life is like in Echo, Nevada.

FIELD

There's plenty to know, if you know where to know, if you know what I mean, which you don't.

CATCH

Don't be such a know-it-all.

FIELD

That isn't hard when you don't know nothing.

CATCH

I know plenty.

FIELD

Plenty of what?

CATCH

Nothing.

FIELD

Exactly.

CATCH

Bizzy and I always got something going on.

FIELD

Something boring.

CATCH

So are you coming or what?

FIELD

What else am I gonna do?

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CATCH

I don't know. You're the one who knows where to know...

(mocking)

If you know what I mean which you don't.

Field nabs the ball from Catch.

FIELD

Well, if mom had let me skip third grade, you wouldn't have to know anything about it. I'd be working on a special project during the summer. But nooooo... Field being smarter than her dumb twin will give Catch a complex.

She tosses the ball and gathers her things.

CATCH

I don't care if you skip a grade. It'd be better than having all my schoolwork compared with yours.

FIELD

So Bizzy's meeting us there?

CATCH

Reading all those books is never gonna make him like you. I might have caught a complex, but I didn't catch a love bug...

(singing)

Field and Bizzy sitting in a tree...

FIELD

I do not! And you're one to talk, getting caught playing footsies with Ashley - kins'.

CATCH

It was a kick!

FIELD

Oh-kaaay.

CATCH

How would you know?

FIELD

I know everything!

CATCH

It wasn't footsies!

BIZZY, a "not very much talking, run up and karate chop you in the face" boy of 11, enters from behind. He wears a Rambo-style bandana around his forehead.

I'll show you footsies-

BIZZY

Bizzy pulls Catch's feet out from under him.

Sucker punch!

CATCH

Vigilance always!

BIZZY

The boys wrestle.

FIELD

Sometimes it'd be nice to have another girl around. Maybe I'd have something to do other than watch endless rounds of World Wide Indian Leg Wrestling -

CATCH

Double W - I.L.W. forever!

Bizzy and Catch start a round of Indian Leg Wrestling. Bizzy wins quickly.

CATCH (CONT'D)

Best two out of three!

BIZZY

I'll take you down with one peg leg tied behind me back!

CATCH

Three for five then!

Field pulls out a book and crosses over to an isolated area, reading.

FIELD

Don't mind me. I'll just be over here improving usable skills.

BIZZY

Do you surrender?

CATCH

Never!

Bizzy summons reserves of masterful strength flipping Catch over facedown on the ground.

CATCH (CONT'D)

You have slain my soul.

Bizzy displays triumph.

BIZZY

Last one to Escalier has to eat something from the Death-Jar.

The two boys face off.

CATCH

Hit 22 tracks along the way with your feet -

BIZZY

Turn 7 times at the intersection...
...And... GO!

Bizzy darts off, with Catch
running after.

FIELD

(beat)

Escalier, Escalier.

She closes her book.

FIELD (CONT'D)

I danced beneath your secret heights
A peak no one could see
I slew the boys
To be alone
with secret books
for me.
Digging a tunnel I flew to the sky
Freezing air a fire inside
but alone
with me
and just a book
is...

(beat)

not much fun.

(beat)

The advanced class at school gets to study French and go on
field trips to museums. Even though they're older, they feel
more like me. We can't really afford the trips anyway.
Instead I get a library card to check out books for free, and
mom works extra hard so Catch can play baseball and have his
own uniform. And I borrow distant places to travel on a
page.

(beat)

Someday I'll go for real, you know? Take field trips of my
own.

(beat, looking off-stage)

FIELD (CONT'D)

I could race, too, you know. They just get mad when I beat them.

Field leaves, following the boys. After a moment a crate lifts up and LU peeks out, a smallish girl of 10 with a largish interior world.

LU

The situation has been compromised and I'm no longer safe. They want to take me with them, but I'll never go. The tunnel must be around here somewhere...

She crawls out, tapping on walls and crates. She peeks under a smaller one, but puts it down quickly.

LU (CONT'D)

So the secret escapist monk, Monkalonious, having foiled the plans of the evil parentage, made his way down the abandoned train tracks, down to the secret cabin at the foot of the mountain, knowing the secret code song to open up the secret underground labyrinth...

(singing a monastic chant)

Ohhh-eeeeee--oooohh-eeee Ohhhh--la---Ooooohhhhlaaaaaa.

(beat)

But no tunnel opened up. That's cause our heroine had to remind herself that she was in a stupid new town where there was no secret tunnel, just a bunch of stupid useless railroad tracks that don't take anyone anywhere.

Lu sits dejectedly on a crate.

LU (CONT'D)

There's nothing to do around here.

Marta didn't send the card like she promised.

Maybe I should be a nun instead of a monk...

Nah, nuns always look like they're sweating underneath those clothes. And monks always get those big fat turkey drumsticks.

Beat, Lu jumps up.

LU (CONT'D)

Yes, Captain Blue-Sky, we have established a base of operations at the foot of the mountain - I believe the locals call it Escalier. From this positioning we should have a clear shot at anyone coming into the area. Roger that. I'll keep a look out.

Offstage sound of runners
approaching.

BIZZY (O.S.)

Oh, yeah-- Eat that!

CATCH (O.S.)

There's no way you counted 22 steps!

Hearing their voices, Lu hides
behind a crate. Bizzy and Catch
enter out of breath.

BIZZY

You calling me a cheat?

CATCH

I was watching you -

BIZZY

Death Jar!

CATCH

C'mon Bizz - you can't really make me eat something-

BIZZY

Where'd we leave it last time?

Bizzy turns over crates,
searching.

CATCH

Let's have a re-match - I'll race you back-

Bizzy exposes Lu.

BIZZY

Hey-!

CATCH

Holy heck! What are you doing?

LU

Hi.

BIZZY

Who are you?

LU

I'm Louisa May - Lu -

BIZZY

What are you doing?

Nothing? LU

CATCH
Louisa May Lou? What'd you do to get a name like that?

LU
No - Louisa May, "Lu" for short.

CATCH
Are you some kind of spy?

LU
No - I was-

BIZZY
What are you doing in here?

LU
I was just - you know - checking things out. Playing. I didn't - My family just moved here - up the road in the yellow rancher -

CATCH
The Carmichael place.

LU
I guess.

BIZZY
What are you doing here?

LU
Just playing -

CATCH
Did you hear what happened to him?

LU
Who?

CATCH
Carmichael.

LU
No, we've only been here about a week-

BIZZY
He died.

CATCH
In the house.

BIZZY
 Watch out for ghosts. Carmichael didn't like anybody on his property.

CATCH
 Especially in his house-

BIZZY
 He probably wants revenge -

CATCH
 He'll eat your soul-

Field finally catches up to the boys.

FIELD
 Catch, I saw you cheat, you only counted 18 steps.

BIZZY
 Hah!

CATCH
 She wasn't even there!

FIELD
 I could hear your feet -

CATCH
 You can't tell from-

FIELD
 (seeing Lu)
 Oh. Hi. Who are you?

BIZZY
 Louisa May Lu-lu from the Carmichael house.

LU
 May name is just Lu. What's yours?

BIZZY
 Bizzy.

LU
 Bizzy? What kind of name is Bizzy?

BIZZY
 None of your Bizzy-ness, loony Lulu-

FIELD
 I'm Field.

Field? LU

Like wheat. You know, a field of wheat? FIELD

Or a field of baseball. CATCH

Or not. FIELD

That's pretty. LU
(to Catch)

And you? CATCH

I don't talk to strangers. CATCH

Bizzy snorts.

That's my brother, Catch. FIELD

Like, you can't catch me - CATCH

And you can't catch a ball- BIZZY

Yes I can! CATCH

Catch you cheating. FIELD

Don't catch a cold - LU

No. CATCH

Catch a complex - FIELD

Catch me telling Bizzy that - CATCH

Don't! FIELD

Telling Bizzy what? BIZZY

Nothing. FIELD

Even Steven? (beat)

For what? CATCH

Footsie-wootsie...? FIELD

Even Steven. CATCH

Shake. FIELD

Catch reluctantly extends his hand, and they shake, adding an additional secret manoeuver. Bizzy regards Lu suspiciously.

BIZZY
You didn't touch anything in here, did you? Cause this is our place.

LU
No - just the boxes. I was just checking it out. I didn't know it belonged to anyone.

BIZZY
Well, now you do.

CATCH
Knowing is half the battle.

FIELD
It's not really ours, we just play here.

CATCH
Hiding like Carmichael under the stairs-

LU
The stairs?

FIELD
Escalier, the big hill there - means stairs in French. It's our place at the foot of Escalier... our place under the stairs.

CATCH
How do you find out the most useless facts in the world?

FIELD
It's not useless to the informed.

CATCH
Well, la-dee-dah.

FIELD
Don't forget you lost the race. You might want to close your mouth before you end up catching flies.

BIZZY
Oh yeah. I forgot.

CATCH
Best 2 of 3?

BIZZY
Nope. Fair and square you lost the game.

FIELD
Death Jar it is.

CATCH
You can't pull out the Death Jar while she's here.

LU
The Death Jar?

BIZZY
You shouldn't have even mentioned it-

FIELD
Oh please.

CATCH
Its hiding place is sacred -

BIZZY
Never to be seen by un-sacred eyes -

CATCH
Especially a girl's -

FIELD
I know where it is.

CATCH
(considering)
You're half of me, so you're kind of a boy. You just wear different clothes.

FIELD
Hiding under a box isn't the most secret -

Ssssshhh!

BIZZY / CATCH

Don't give it away!

CATCH

Are you talking about that thing under there?

LU

You disturbed its rest?

BIZZY

You're in for it now.

CATCH

It doesn't like to be disturbed by those not in the sacred circle.

BIZZY

Oh, please.

FIELD

I just lifted the box, I didn't disturb anything -

LU

Bizzy lifts the smallish crate pulling out a large mason jar filled with some kind of crusty black ooze. He extends it high over his head, an object of honor and esteem.

BIZZY

The Death Jar.

CATCH
(echoing)

The Death Jar.

FIELD

Disgusting.

LU

What is that?

BIZZY

A secret you are far too strange to know.

CATCH

Yeah, cause you're a stranger.

FIELD

There are stranger people here than her. That's for sure.

LU

What's in there?

BIZZY

Quiet! You are silenced in the presence of the Death Jar.

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