

SECRET LIFE UNDER THE STAIRS

A one-act dramedy for young audiences by
Kris Knutsen

This script is for evaluation only. It may not be printed, photocopied or distributed digitally under any circumstances. Possession of this file does not grant the right to perform this play or any portion of it, or to use it for classroom study.

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com
424-703-5315

Secret Life Under the Stairs © 2008 Kris Knutsen
All rights reserved. ISBN 978-1-62088-448-5.

Caution: This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, Canada, the British Commonwealth and all other countries of the copyright union and is subject to royalty for all performances including but not limited to professional, amateur, charity and classroom whether admission is charged or presented free of charge.

Reservation of Rights: This play is the property of the author and all rights for its use are strictly reserved and must be licensed by his representative, YouthPLAYS. This prohibition of unauthorized professional and amateur stage presentations extends also to motion pictures, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video and the rights of adaptation or translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments: Amateur and stock performance rights are administered exclusively by YouthPLAYS. No amateur, stock or educational theatre groups or individuals may perform this play without securing authorization and royalty arrangements in advance from YouthPLAYS. Required royalty fees for performing this play are available online at www.YouthPLAYS.com. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Required royalties must be paid each time this play is performed and may not be transferred to any other performance entity. All licensing requests and inquiries should be addressed to YouthPLAYS.

Author Credit: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line with no other accompanying written matter. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s) and the name of the author(s) may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution: All programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with YouthPLAYS (www.youthplays.com).

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying: Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book, whether by photocopying, scanning, video recording or any other means, is strictly prohibited by law. This book may only be copied by licensed productions with the purchase of a photocopy license, or with explicit permission from YouthPLAYS.

Trade Marks, Public Figures & Musical Works: This play may contain references to brand names or public figures. All references are intended only as parody or other legal means of expression. This play may also contain suggestions for the performance of a musical work (either in part or in whole). YouthPLAYS has not obtained performing rights of these works unless explicitly noted. The direction of such works is only a playwright's suggestion, and the play producer should obtain such permissions on their own. The website for the U.S. copyright office is <http://www.copyright.gov>.

COPYRIGHT RULES TO REMEMBER

1. To produce this play, you must receive prior written permission from YouthPLAYS and pay the required royalty.
2. You must pay a royalty each time the play is performed in the presence of audience members outside of the cast and crew. Royalties are due whether or not admission is charged, whether or not the play is presented for profit, for charity or for educational purposes, or whether or not anyone associated with the production is being paid.
3. No changes, including cuts or additions, are permitted to the script without written prior permission from YouthPLAYS.
4. Do not copy this book or any part of it without written permission from YouthPLAYS.
5. Credit to the author and YouthPLAYS are required on all programs and other promotional items associated with this play's performance.

When you pay royalties, you are recognizing the hard work that went into creating the play and making a statement that a play is something of value. We think this is important, and we hope that everyone will do the right thing, thus allowing playwrights to generate income and continue to create wonderful new works for the stage.

Plays are owned by the playwrights who wrote them. Violating a playwright's copyright is a very serious matter and violates both United States and international copyright law. Infringement is punishable by actual damages and attorneys' fees, statutory damages of up to \$150,000 per incident, and even possible criminal sanctions. **Infringement is theft. Don't do it.**

Have a question about copyright? Please contact us by email at info@youthplays.com or by phone at 424-703-5315. When in doubt, please ask.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CATCH, a boy: age 10, brother to Field, fraternal twin.

FIELD, a girl: age 10, sister to Catch, fraternal twin.

BIZZY, a boy: age 11, friend of Catch and Field.

LU, a 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. An 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?

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.)

BIZZY: I'll show you footsies –

(Bizzy pulls Catch's feet out from under him.)

CATCH: Sucker punch!

BIZZY: Vigilance always!

(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.)

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.)

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.)

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 offstage:)* 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.)

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—eeee—oooohh-eeee Ohhhh - la—Ooooohhhhlaaaaa.

(*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.*)

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.*)

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: (*Off:*) Oh, yeah – Eat that!

CATCH: (*Off:*) 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?

LU: Nothing?

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: My 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.

LU: Field?

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

CATCH: Or a field of baseball.

FIELD: Or not.

LU: That's pretty. *(To Catch:)* And you?

CATCH: I don't talk to strangers.

(Bizzy snorts.)

FIELD: That's my brother, Catch.

CATCH: Like, you can't catch me—

BIZZY: And you can't catch a ball—

CATCH: Yes I can!

FIELD: Catch you cheating.

LU: Don't catch a cold—

CATCH: No.

FIELD: Catch a complex—

CATCH: Catch me telling Bizzy that—

FIELD: Don't!

BIZZY: Telling Bizzy what?

FIELD: Nothing. *(Beat.)* Even Steven?

CATCH: For what?

FIELD: Footsie-wootsie...?

CATCH: Even Steven.

FIELD: Shake.

(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 two of three?

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—

BIZZY / CATCH: Ssssshhh!

CATCH: Don't give it away!

LU: Are you talking about that thing under there?

BIZZY: You disturbed its rest?

CATCH: You're in for it now.

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

FIELD: Oh, please.

LU: I just lifted the box, I didn't disturb anything—

(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.

Want to read the entire script? Order a perusal

copy today!

© Kris Knutsen

This is a perusal copy only.

Absolutely no printing, copying or performance permitted.