

Tennessee Wet Rub

A Play

by Kim E. Ruyle

Kim E. Ruyle  
W6842 Blue Heron Blvd #14  
Fond du Lac, WI 54937  
kim.ruyle@inventivetalent.com  
616-308-3255



Copyright © 2022 by Kim E. Ruyle

## Tennessee Wet Rub

## Cast of Characters

<u>HANK DUNWIDDIE</u>	White male, 60s. Speaks with a Tennessee mountain dialect, Appalachian English.
<u>BERTHA DUNWIDDIE</u>	White female, 60s. Hank's wife.
<u>DUNK FREEMAN</u>	Black male, early 20s. Highly intelligent and well-spoken. Confident, almost cocky, but very politically savvy and polite.
<u>ARLETA EASTER</u>	White female, teens. Demure. Wary.
<u>VERN</u>	White male, 20.
TIME:	January 30 – 31, 1951.
SETTING:	While a snow and ice storm rages outside, we're safely inside Bertha's BBQ, a quaint establishment in the hills of northern Tennessee not far from the Kentucky border.
SET:	A rustic BBQ restaurant. Better than a shack, but not by much. More of a solid cabin – the floor and walls rough wood. Simple electric bulbs hang from the ceiling. A potbelly wood stove to one side. A couple of dining tables ringed by chairs. A counter with stools. A hand-lettered menu on the wall. Opposite the stove, a door leads upstairs to the proprietors' apartment. Another behind the counter leads to the kitchen. A back door near the stove opens to a path that leads offstage, presumably to the smokehouse in one direction and, in the other direction, to the privy, a sturdy outhouse shitter. Ideally, there's a faint aroma of barbecue in the theatre that grows in intensity through the third scene.
SYNOPSIS:	It's January 30, 1951, and perhaps what is the worst winter storm in Tennessee's history is burying the state under snow and ice. Roads have been shut down, and people are without power. As the storm rages, Bertha and Hank, an older white couple, huddle in their shuttered barbecue restaurant around a kerosene lantern when two young people, a white girl and a black male enter. The values and compassion of Bertha and Hank are put to the test when a deputy sheriff arrives hunting for something or someone.
RUNNING TIME:	~115 Minutes.

*"Barbecue sauce is like a beautiful woman. If it's too sweet, it's bound to be hiding something."*  
~Lyle Lovett

*"We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike."*  
~Maya Angelou

## PRODUCTION NOTES

1. Please love and respect these characters. They are not caricatures.
2. If desired to produce without an intermission, the act transition can be seamless.
3. The Appalachian dialogue is written with an eye dialect, a spelling to approximate pronunciation. Nevertheless, it is important to have dialect coaching for both Appalachian and Scottish dialects. To aid in interpretation the Appalachian dialect, a brief glossary is provided in an appendix.

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

Darkness. We hear wind whistling. A moment, then overhead light bulbs flicker a few times before burning steady to illuminate Bertha's BBQ. As the whistle of the wind rises and falls, Bertha wraps her sweater tightly as she shivers and hugs herself. She's a sturdy woman. Sturdy build. Sturdy character. Sturdy as her shoes. For nearly five decades her fortitude has sustained her as she's labored over a wood-fired barbecue pit, pitched platters slathered with meat and slaw, and scrubbed grease from stacks of plates.

Bertha stands downstage looking out front, steeling herself against the weather she sees through an apparent window in the fourth wall. But it's more than weather she sees. Her expression spells impending doom.

The back door bursts open admitting a Hank with a gust of chill wind. He wears his age well, no less sturdy than his wife, but he's no tree stump. More of a vigorous willow branch, tough, wiry, resilient. In one hand, Hank carries a meat hook which he hangs on a peg by the door.

Hank stomps his feet and hangs his cap over the meat hook before removing deerskin gloves. He shakes out his jacket and hangs it on another peg. Hank wears heavy boots, jeans held up by suspenders over a flannel shirt. On his belt hangs a custom holster holding a large meat cleaver.

HANK

Jes ice. Pure ice comin' down. But I got 'er stoked. Good 'til ta'marr least.

*Pauses waiting for a response.*

Hear me? She's stoked 'til ta'marr.

BERTHA

*Continuing to stare outside.*

Waste a wood. Nobody comin' out in this weather.

HANK

But still. Gotta keep ice out'n the stovepipe. Keep 'er warm.

The lights flicker again. Hank takes notice, exits to kitchen. He returns momentarily carrying two kerosene lanterns and places one on each of the dining tables but doesn't light them.

HANK (CONT.)

All that ice. 'Bout fell on my ass comin' in... Lines gonna be down 'fore long.

BERTHA

*Without turning.*

Language.

*Pause.*

We're in the End Times, Hank. I feel it.

HANK

Aah, Sugar. Ya said same thang last year we's havin' that cyclone. It's jes a lil ice.

BERTHA

This is diff'rent. I feel it. Don' you feel it? It ain't jes ice. It's a darkness descendin'.

HANK

We got wood. Food. Blankets. 'N we got kerosene. Darkness ain't no problem.

BERTHA

This ain't no reg'lar darkness. It's a *mean* darkness descendin'.

HANK

Threw a couple a racks in there. Smokehouse a cookin' now. Lessen three hours, ribs be ready. No cus'mers. Be perfect time t' spearmint.

BERTHA

No wet rub gonna stop what's comin'.

Hank approaches and, from behind, wraps his arms around Bertha, gives a lascivious smile.

HANK

Could use a little darkness. Ya know? Not for spearmintin' with no recipe. But spearmintin' with you.

Bertha breaks free and moves to behind the counter. From under the counter, she pulls out a large cast iron skillet and places it on the counter. From the skillet, Bertha pulls an equally large black Bible and begins paging through.

BERTHA

No time t' be playin' the devil!

*Reading, a sense of dread.*

*For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

HANK

Aah, Sugar.

BERTHA

I tell ya, Mister, they's a mean darkness comin'.

HANK

Keep on. Jes keep on. Maybe ya git yer wish.

Hank sighs, begins stoking the wood stove. The electric lights suddenly extinguish leaving the room in near darkness, only illuminated by the glow from the wood stove. Bertha gasps.

BERTHA

Dear Lord Jesus, no! It ain't my wish!

Hank straightens with a smile and goes to light the kerosene lanterns.

HANK

Like I tol' ya. Lines comin' down. It's jes the ice.

The room now lit in the soft glow of kerosene lamps, Bertha brings the skillet and Bible to a table, sits near a lantern, and begins flipping again through the Bible.

BERTHA

*Reading with a sense of urgency.*

*For in those days shall be affliction such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, neither shall be.*

Hank gives a heavy sigh and moves downstage to look out front. A pause.

HANK

Blowin' white now. Changin' over t' snow.

Bertha rises, joins Hank. He puts an arm around her. A pause as they stare outside.

BERTHA

Ain't white. It's a mean darkness what it is.

HANK

*Chuckling.*

Looks white t' me, Sugar. Blowin' sideways it is... Why y'all gotta be so –

BERTHA

Ya don' never take thangs serious!

*Beat.*

'Cep yer recipes. Forty years dry rub's been good 'nough. Why y'all gotta be so obsessed?

HANK

Don' worry yer purty head 'bout it. Once I git the right recipe, wet rub's gonna put us on the map. I tell ya, my wet rub's gonna light up this place.

*On exiting to kitchen.*

Git some coffee. Want some?

Bertha gasps, terrified by something outside.

BERTHA

HANK! THEY'S SUMPIN OUT THERE!

Hank enters with coffee pot and two cups and chuckles as he places them on the counter.

HANK

Whatchu see, Sugar? A booger? Polar bear? Maybe one a them *abdominal* snowmen?

BERTHA

Sumpin dark! Right outside the window! I saw it movin'!

A moment passes as Hank pours coffee and Bertha continues to stare out the window with concern. The back door suddenly swings open, and a shivering Arleta timidly enters. She's a wisp, not much more than a girl, pale as a ghost and shabbily dressed, no coat, only a light sweater, and shoes better suited to the beach than to snow and ice. She clutches a bundle wrapped in a blanket to her breast.

Hank and Bertha straighten, startled. A moment to take it in, then...

BERTHA (CONT.)

Whatchu doin', Chile! Get on in here out'n the cold!

HANK

And shut that damn door!

BERTHA

Language.

Bertha scoots to shut the door with one hand and grabs a coat from a coat rack with her other. She wraps Arleta with the coat and moves her to a table.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Git 'er some coffee! Dear Lord! You got a baby there?!

ARLETA

Oh, no... Not really.

BERTHA

Whatchu mean, *not really*? Whatchu got there? In yer poke.

Arleta opens her blanket-wrapped bundle to reveal a heavy porcelain doll wearing a frilly dress and a small purse on a dainty chain. Carefully, she places the doll on a chair, positions her just so, and hangs the purse around her neck.

Bertha looks on with wide eyes a moment before pulling out a chair for Arleta and taking a seat beside her. Bertha takes Arleta's hands and begins rubbing.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Yorn hands be freezin'. Whatchu doin' out in that cold?

ARLETA

I's sorry... Uh... The front door was locked.

BERTHA

Ah, Chile. With this wind, we dint een hear ya.

*Turning to Hank.*

Tol' ya I saw sumpin.

Hank joins them at the table with a cup of coffee for Arleta. He looks at the doll, confusion clouding his face, then studies Arleta. An awkward silence.

Uh... Our car went in a ditch.

ARLETA

Are you/ hurt?

BERTHA

/Where? Whatchu/ mean *our* car?

HANK

They's somebody/ else?

BERTHA

/Y'all dint leave a chile out there, didja?

HANK

*Nodding to the doll.*

I mean a real chile?

It's my... Uh... My fiancé.

ARLETA

Hank jumps up and throws on his coat.

He hurt? Where is he?

HANK

No, sir. You don' gotta go outside. He's here.

ARLETA

*Beat.*

There. Sir. He's out there.

Hank opens the back door to reveal Dunk standing on the threshold, no coat, wrapping and slapping his arms. He's tall, lean. And black. Hank stares, then slams the door.

Sweet Jesus! That be yer fiancé?! A negro?! Gurl, whatchu thankin'?!  
HANK

Arleta whimpers, and Bertha leaps to her feet.

Mister, you open that door! Don't leave the boy standin' out there!  
BERTHA

Hank hesitates, but Bertha wins the stare down, and he opens the door. Dunk just stands there shivering. A beat as they regard each other, then...

HANK

Don' jes stan' there. Git on in here.

Dunk slowly steps in, and Hank slams the door. An awkward pause as Hank and Bertha suspiciously regard Dunk. Arleta softly weeps.

BERTHA

Don' stan' there, son. We're Christian people. Come on in. Git warm.

HANK

Now jes a minute!

*Hand to the holstered meat cleaver, shifts gaze from Dunk to Arleta.*

Look at me, gurl. Has this boy hurt ya? You tell the truth now.

Arleta, tears streaming, wags her head. She jumps up, runs to Dunk, and embraces him. Dunk doesn't return the embrace. Instead, he stands there awkwardly and warily watches Hank.

BERTHA

No! No, no! None a that in here!

Arleta releases the embrace but takes Dunk's hand.

BERTHA (CONT.)

No touchin' now. You. Come have a seat. And you. Stay yonder by the stove.

HANK

Whatchu thankin', Woman. We can't allow –

BERTHA

Hank! Grab nuther cup. Cain't ya see he's freezin'.

Bertha wins another stare down. Hank reluctantly removes, hangs his coat, and shuffles to the kitchen.

Arleta takes a seat at the table. Dunk relaxes a bit and warms his hands by the stove. Bertha sits next to Arleta as Hank returns, hands coffee to Dunk, and stands aside suspiciously eying Dunk.

DUNK

Thank you, sir.

HANK

Y'all know yer breaking the law, and we cain't –

BERTHA

Hank!

*Turning to Arleta.*

Who are you, gurl? Where y'all come from?

ARLETA

We're on our way to Detroit. Dunk's got uncles up there.

HANK

*Dunk?* Who's Dunk?

DUNK

That's me, sir.

HANK

What kinda name's *Dunk*?

DUNK

Jefferson Jasper Freeman. My family calls me JJ, but my friends call me Dunk.

*Beat, allowing a slight smile.*

I don't play basketball, sir.

HANK

The hell that mean?

*Beat.*

Jasper? *Jasper?! Ya mean like, what? Y'all some kinda colored peckerwood? Who on God's earth gives a young'un a name like Jasper?*

DUNK

*Chuckling.*

*Colored peckerwood?* Well, that's a new one.

*Then, quickly losing the smile.*

No, sir. It's Dunk. Dunk, just because I like donuts.

HANK

Good God.

BERTHA

Hank.

*Beat.*

And you?

ARLETA

My daddy's preacher at Jesus Name Pentecostal in Spartie.

BERTHA

So, y'all know the Lord Jesus.

ARLETA

Oh, yes, ma'am.

BERTHA

Look at me, Chile. Straight on in my eyes. Don' be tellin' no stories now.

ARLETA

No, ma'am. I'm spirit-filled and warshed in the blood.

HANK

Then y'all know better than be runnin' with a colored.

DUNK

We're in love, sir. In Michigan we can –

HANK

It's a matter a right 'n' wrong!

DUNK

My daddy's a preacher, too, sir. I know right and wrong.

BERTHA

Yer daddy's okay with this?

DUNK

Ma'am, my daddy's fine with it.

BERTHA

I ast *her*.

ARLETA

My daddy's... He's a good man.

BERTHA

But he knowed you're runnin' away?

ARLETA

He knowed... We's in love.

Hank returns to table and drops to a chair.

HANK

God almighty. What kinda gaumed up sichiation we got here? A negro travelin' with a white gurl. She ain't nuthin but a chile.

BERTHA

*Laying a calming hand on Hank's.*

What's yer name?

ARLETA

Arleta.

DUNK

A person can't see a thing out there right now, but when it clears up, maybe I can get a push out of the ditch. If we can just wait out the storm, we'd be obliged.

HANK

I don't see how –

BERTHA

Course y'all can stay, least til the storm's over. We're Christian people. Dunwiddies. Hank and Bertha Dunwiddie.

DUNK

Pleased to meet you and thank you for your hospitality.

ARLETA

We smelled the barbecue we got out'n the car. Wind carried that smell right to us. Then we thought we saw lights.

DUNK

My grandma makes the best barbecue in the world.

HANK

Says the jasper.

DUNK

*Parrying with a warm grin.*

Course, I haven't tasted yours... Sir.

HANK

I got a couple a racks in the smokehouse now. Best dry rub in the state.

DUNK

I believe you, sir. And I believe my grandma does the best wet rub.

HANK

*Wet rub?! Hell, you say!*

BERTHA

Language, Mister.

DUNK

Thinking about grandma's wet rub barbecue and cornbread... Well, it sure does make a fellow hungry.

Hank slowly rises from his chair walks to the wood stove near Dunk, places a hand on his holstered meat cleaver, gives a suspicious stare that morphs to a stink eye. Uncomfortable pause. Dunk stares at the meat cleaver, considers his position.

DUNK (CONT.)

But any barbecue's good. It's all good.

Hank folds his arms, continues to glare. Dunk shifts on his feet nervously.

DUNK (CONT.)

Sir... Do you ever use a mop sauce with your dry rub?

HANK

Hear that, Bertha? Jasper wants t' learn me all 'bout barbecue.

DUNK

No sir. I didn't mean that. You're the expert. I only know about wet rub.

HANK

*Suspicion giving way to intense curiosity.*

Wet rub expert are ya? Mind. Don' be tellin' no stories now.

DUNK

Sir, it's not seemly to brag, and I give all the credit to my grandma. But speaking honestly and with all humility, I would say:

*Beat.*

Yes, sir. I am an expert when it comes to wet rub.

BERTHA

Don' go openin' that door, son, talkin' 'bout no wet rub.

Too late. The door's open, and Hank can't hide his passion for barbecue and newfound interest in Dunk.

HANK

*Unable to contain his enthusiasm in ensuing discussion.*

They's in the smokehouse. Jes two racks. But I ain't rubbed 'em yet.

DUNK

Don't you have to rub before/ the heat?

BERTHA

*Overlapping.*

/Tell me 'bout/ the doll.

HANK

*Overlapping.*

/Ain't gonna dry rub 'em. Fixin' to/ spearmint with some wet rub.

ARLETA

*Overlapping.*

/Cinderella. That's/ her name.

DUNK

*Overlapping.*

/But still, it's important to... What's/ your base?

BERTHA

*Overlapping.*

/She's special t'/ ya.

HANK

*Overlapping.*

/Ketchup. Corn/ syrup. I'm spearmintin with my recipe. Ain't sayin' no more. It's a secret.

ARLETA

*Overlapping.*

/Yes, ma'am.

Bertha shifts in her seat. Looks with annoyance at Hank.

DUNK

How about mustard? Got the right kind of vinegar?

HANK

Boy, I got ever'thin'. Ever' spice. Ever'thin' I need fer my spearmints.

DUNK

When are they going to be ready? Shouldn't you be preparing the sauce now?

HANK

Don' go tellin' me how to sauce no ribs! I's jes fixin' t' mix up a batch when y'all showed up.

DUNK

Yes, sir... Would you like some help?

HANK

Don' need no hep.

DUNK

I used to help my grandma. Learned a lot from her.

HANK

Yer grandma, huh?

DUNK

Best wet rub in Tennessee. Recipe passed down from the plantation. Several generations.

HANK

What she use fer her sauce?

DUNK

Family secret. She kept it close to the vest, but I helped her out and know the formula by heart.

HANK

Do ya now? She use beer?

DUNK

Grandma?! Oh, no sir. She said beer was...

*Chuckling.*

She called it the devil's *piddle*.

*Beat.*

But you shouldn't wait too long before basting. When will they be done?

BERTHA

Jes hadda open that door dint ya? Y'all got no idee what ya done stirred up gittin' the mister talkin' 'bout wet rub.

*Beat.*

Let's head on upstairs, Chile. Let these boys talk their barbecue.

HANK

*Lightly, slightly grinning.*

Naw. Y'all can stay here. I'll take the jasper into the kitchen.

*Beat.*

Well, come on, then. Let's see whatchu really know 'bout wet rub.

Dunk, catching Hank's enthusiasm, nods excitedly and follows Hank to the kitchen. When they're out of sight, Bertha drills Arleta.

BERTHA

Okay, Chile. I want the story. The whole story.

ARLETA

I got her on my sixth birthday.

BERTHA

Not talkin' 'bout no doll. How'd ya meet *that* boy?

ARLETA

Oh. Well, they was a meetin' of all the county preachers. White folk. But fer this meetin', bein' all Christianly, they een 'vited the coloreds. The preachers. So, Dunk's daddy was there. My daddy, too, but he dint want t' leave me home, so he took me 'long, but I had t' wait outside. So, I's jes waitin'. But then, out yonder behind the church, I seen Dunk sittin' by hisself under a tree.

BERTHA

But ya knowed better than t' be talkin' to him, gettin' him in trouble.

ARLETA

Ast what he was readin'. They was poyems from some Scottish feller named Robert Burns.

BERTHA

*Poyems?* Have mercy. Our kinfolk come from Scotland, but I shore don' know 'bout no poyems. Mercy.

ARLETA

His voice is so... Don' ya jes love the way he talks? He read me some a them poyems. I mean, he can read 'em jes like he's from Scotland. Then he tells y'all what it all means cuz they got some gaumed up speech in Scotland. Words gaumed up. All kinda si-gogglin... But Dunk... Don' ya jes thank he's really sumpin'?

*Dreamy.*

I mean, don' ya thank he's really sumpin'? Really... Really... Sumpin'.

BERTHA

Butcha knowed better.

ARLETA

Made me promise not to tell his daddy 'bout them poyems cuz he woun't approve.

BERTHA

So, *he lies to his daddy?* What/ else that boy be lyin' 'bout?

ARLETA

/Oh, no ma'am! Dunk ain't no liar!

BERTHA

And don' be tellin' me yer daddy approves a y'all runnin' with a colored boy... What 'bout yer mama?

ARLETA

I ain't got a mama. She died I's six. Jes after givin' me Cinderella.

BERTHA

*Pause, softening.*

Aah, Chile... But you gotcha a sister t' hep ya?

ARLETA

Jes me 'n' my daddy.

BERTHA

I mean a sister in yer church family. A Christian woman t' give ya some guidance?

Arleta shrugs, looks down. From the other table, Bertha retrieves Bible in a skillet, finds a reference.

BERTHA (CONT.)

'Fore y'all go gittin' married to a colored, ya gots t' consider what God's Word says 'bout marriage.

ARLETA

Ya keep yer Bible in a skillet?

BERTHA

See what it says here in Ephesians?

Arleta takes a moment struggling to read, lips moving silently. A pause. A nod.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Is that colored boy gonna be able t' love ya like Christ loves the Church?

ARLETA

Dunk knows scripture 'bout as good as ary a preacher.

BERTHA

I don' know what t' thank 'bout it. They ain't nuthin agin marryin' a far'ner. Ruth and Boaz got married, and she became great grandma t' King David. I mean, they was far'ners but not colored. But I ain't really sure. Maybe that's why some the jew people got kinky hair. But jews gotta be white, cuz Jesus was white.

*Pausing, groaning.*

Tell truth, Chile, I ain't shore what to thank 'bout what's right 'n' wrong. But I know the law. And, Chile, y'all cain't be breakin' the law.

ARLETA

Why we're goin' to Michigan.

BERTHA

Sides, ain't y'all too young t' be gittin' married?

ARLETA

No ma'am. I'll be seventeen nexchear. Dunk says I'm a *bonnie wee thang*. That's from one a them poyems a that Robert Burns feller. But that don' mean I's too young t' marry.

BERTHA

Ah, Chile.

Bertha rises, refills coffee cups and retakes a seat. She looks compassionately on Arleta a moment then pats her hand.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Chile, Chile, Chile. That boy know he's gittin' sich a...? A bonnie wee thang, ya say?

ARLETA

I do thank y'all fer yer kindness.

*Pause.*

Why ya keep yer Bible in a skillet?

BERTHA

This here's my granny's Bible. And her skillet. I's a lil gurl, they's a far. A turble, turble far. All that was left of granny's house was this skillet and her Bible. It was shore 'nough a miracle. That far burned everthang in her house. But no far could touch God's Word.

*Beat.*

And this here skillet.

Arleta solemnly takes the Bible, strokes its cover, gives a sniff.

ARLETA

Don' een smell a smoke.

She carefully returns the Bible to the skillet gives a bit of a grin.

ARLETA (CONT.)

Maybe got some barbecue smell, but shore 'nough a miracle.

Silence.

BERTHA

Y'all gots money t' travel?

Arleta twitches, and her eyes dart to the purse hanging around the doll's neck. Then she catches herself.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Y'all gots money in the purse, dontcha?

Arleta shrugs. Bertha takes the purse, removes an envelope containing a wad of bills.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Dear Lord Jesus! Where'd this come from, gurl?! Don' be lyin' now. That boy steal this?

ARLETA

Oh, no ma'am! Dunk got his own money.

Bertha begins counting money out on the table.

BERTHA

Where'd y'all get this?

ARLETA

We just need 'nough to get to the Hudson Motor Company in Detroit. Dunk's uncles are doin' factory work on the Hornet. It's a car. Ya seen one?

*Beat.*

Leastwise, they say the Hudson Hornet is the future of the automobile.

BERTHA

*Where?*

ARLETA

Detroit. We can have a future in Detroit.

BERTHA

The money! Where'd y'all git it?

ARLETA

Dunk don't know nuthin 'bout it, ma'am. I swear.

BERTHA

Don' be swearin' with me, missy! Didja steal this money?

ARLETA

I jes...

BERTHA

Yer daddy give it to ya?

Arleta begins to softly cry.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Hunnerd 'n eighty-eight dollars! Oh, dear Lord!

ARLETA

I's gonna pay it back.

BERTHA

You stole it?! This/ gonna git y'all in a pack a trouble.

ARLETA

/No ma'am. Jes borrowed it.

BERTHA

Yer daddy a preacher and ya thank he got this kinda money to spare?

ARLETA

No, ma'am.

Hank enters carrying a jug and a third lit lantern followed by Dunk who carries a jug and pail of utensils. Hank is cheerful now, has a bounce in his step. The men set the jugs on a table, a dramatic victory gesture. They smile, quite a contrast with the sour faces worn by the two women.

Note: third lantern will move to and from kitchen as needed.

HANK

Well, it seems the boy ain't sich a colored peckerwood after all. Least not in the kitchen.

DUNK

*Can't contain a chuckle.*

Thank you, sir. That's... Quite a compliment.

Silence reigns as looks are exchanged, men grinning, women scowling. Hank turns his attention to the wad of bills in Bertha's fist.

HANK

What's all that?

BERTHA

Sumpin we's fixin' to talk 'bout.

Arleta lets escape a whimper which is overlooked by the men, but not by Bertha.

HANK

Well, y'all gotta give us a few minutes. Dunk here and me are havin' a lil contest.

DUNK

Yes, ma'am, we are. A wet rub contest.

BERTHA

Lord hep us.

Hank tosses a coat to Dunk. They button up to face the cold, grab their jugs, and bounce out back door.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Don' that beat all.

ARLETA

Ma'am?

BERTHA

Hank ain't easy. Man on a mission t' make the world's best barbecue sauce. But he shore ain't easy. Looks like they's gittin' on. Mus' be Dunk done foun' the key t' the feller's... Mercy. Foun' key t' the feller's...

*Beat, wag of the head.*

Well, let's git ya upstairs, Chile. Find ya sumpin' else t' wear. Yer feet must be freezin'.

Arleta nods as Bertha gathers up the bills and stuffs them back in the purse.

BERTHA (CONT.)

Ain't no tellin' what the mister's gonna say he finds out y'all took money from yer daddy. Yer fixin' t' be in a heap a trouble Chile. They's a mean darkness descendin'.

Arleta shivers. She slowly stands, picks up her doll and purse, and follows Bertha to exit.

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE