THE FAST RUNNER

A MOUNTAIN MORALITY PLAY IN ONE ACT

By ARTHUR McLEAN

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THE FAST RUNNER

CHARACTERS
(In Order Of Appearance)

GRANNY
GRAMPAW
LANTA
THE OLD MAN
THE FAST RUNNER

SETTING: The front exterior of an unpainted shack in the Southern Appalachians, with a low front porch (without railing) extending across the entire front, and a bareswept yard. A door at REAR CENTER leads into the house. There is a short bench against the wall at RIGHT of the door, and there is an old rocking-chair at the LEFT END of the porch, several feet out from the wall and facing RIGHT. Suspended from a beam by a chain at the RIGHT END of the porch is an iron bar bent into a large triangle. Hanging by a cord very close to the triangle is a long iron bolt to be used as a striker.

[NOTE: A large ring of iron, or a farm bell, could be used instead of a triangle; or an old brake-drum as these were often used in the backwoods as gongs or bells.]

AT RISE: It is a fall day, late in the afternoon and twilight begins to fall as the play progresses. It is nearly dark at the end. The stage is bare. A voice is heard, singing: a high, doleful, quavering chant.

GRANNY: (Singing.) Oh, sinners, don’t yuh see how your end’s a-comin’ soon?
Oh, sinners, don’t yuh see how your end’s a-comin’ soon?
Don’t yuh see evvy day-ay
How the people pass away?
See how your end’s a-comin’ soon. (GRANNY comes in at CENTER. Going toward triangle, continues song.)
Oh, brethren, don’t yuh see how your end’s a-comin’ soon?
Oh, brethren, don’t yuh see how your end’s a-comin’ soon?
(As she sings she seizes the bolt, hammers on the triangle several times, then continues singing.)
Don’t yuh see evvy day-ay
How the people pass away?
See . . . how . . . your . . . end’s . . . a-comin’ . . .
soon . . . (She goes to the rocker at LEFT, sits, the last line of the song dying away as she lowers herself into the chair.)

GRAMPAAW: (Carrying a hoe, comes in RIGHT. Leaning hoe against the house.) Where’s Lanta? Where’s that triflin’ gran-chile?

GRANNY: She hain’t come home yit, an’ supper’s a-gittin’ col’.
The leaves are all a-fallin’, an’ the days are drawin’ in, an’ hit gits dark a-moughty soon.
GRAMPAW: Reckon why she’s late a-comin’ home?

GRANNY: Reckon she’s down thar at the settle-MENT, a-runnin’ a race with that thar new feller come las’ week fum over Lumpkin way. Lordy, Lordy, I do wisht Lanta would’n’ run no races thataway. ‘Tain’t no fittin’ way for gal-folks to carry on . . . bold as brass, an’ run lak a man!

GRAMPAW: She runs a heap sight faster’n any man I ever seed in my born days. Hain’t NO man can race with HER. *Steps up onto porch, and sits on the bench at RIGHT of the door.* Hain’t no wonder a-tall evvybody calls her the Fast Runner, now, jes’ lak hit war her Christern name.

GRANNY: She war a-frettin’ jist the yuther day that nobody won’t race with her no more a-tall, ’cause she’s allus shore to win.

GRAMPAW: She’s so powerful set up about what a fast runner she is, she jist don’t do nothin’ but race when she kin, an’ don’t do nothin’ a-tall when she cain’t do that.

GRANNY: *(Plaintively, enjoying mild self-pity.)* An’ her pore ol’ Granny has to keep a-cookin’ an’ a-cookin’, an’ a-warshin’ an’ a-warshin’, day in an’ day out, with never no stop, an’ never no holp fum her a-tall.

GRAMPAW: An’ her pore ole Grampaw has to hoe the patch an’ dig the taters, an’ take the corn to mill. *(Changing tone.)* An’ we both of us love hit, ol’ woman, an’ wouldn’t have hit no other way. We’re plum’ crazy about that-there chile, an’ that’s a fac’ . . . seein’ as how she’s all we got left us now.

GRANNY: Yes, she’s all we got left . . . all we got left . . . all . . . we . . . got . . . left . . . *(Her voice trails.)*

GRAMPAW: She hain’t young but wunst, so let her have her fling while she kin.

GRANNY: *(Shaking her head sadly.)* Yes, while she kin, Lord, while she kin. *(Looking up.)* Thar she be! Thar’s Lanta comin’ up the trail rat now.

*(LANTA ENTERS right: a slim mountain girl of about seventeen, with olive-tanned skin, and a mass of straight black hair hanging loose to her shoulders. She wears a bright, flaunting dress, mostly red, with some yellow, which strikes her just at the knee. She wears no shoes. It is hard to tell whether she is gawky or*
graceful. She walks and talks with a boastful, swaggering air, but nothing very offensive. She just has the air of an overgrown child with an overgrown ego and a good deal of the joy of life.)

GRAMPAW: Where you been all this time, Lanta?

LANTA: Down yander at the settle-MENT.

GRANNY: (Muttering.) An' supper a-gittin' col' . . . col' . . . col' . . .

GRAMPAW: You been a-racin' with that-thar man fum over Lumpkin way?

LANTA: (Disgusted, but swaggering.) Naw. That-thar man fum Lumpkin, he's too prideful. He's plum' ashamed to git beat by gal-folks, an' all the folks down at the settle-MENT tell him he's shore to git beat, so he says the doctor tole him not to run no more, 'count of a misery in his heart. They're all a-skeered to race with ME. Reckon I'm jes' about the fastes' runner they is. When I run, I jes' natcherly FLY! An' cain't nobody ketch me . . . not nobody a-tall!

GRAMPAW: (Uneasily.) Lanta, yore a-gittin' too uppity.

GRANNY: (Wagging her head.) Hit's shore bad luck to talk thataway.

GRAMPAW: Shore better knock on wood!

LANTA: Hain't a-studyin' knockin' on no wood.

GRANNY: Lanta, I'm shore worried about all sech foolishment. Hain't hit about tam ye marrit ye a man an' settlelet down?

LANTA: (Carelessly.) Maybe I'll marry me a man . . . some day.

GRAMPAW: I hearn tell Rafe Bradfield's been a-makin' eyes at ye, down to the settle-MENT. Now, THAT'S a rat likely boy. Got him a good forty acre o' bottom land, an' works reg'lar. Be he shore 'nough a-makin' up to ye?

LANTA: Shore enough. He's done a'ready ast me to marry him.

GRANNY: Well, air ye a-goin' to?
LANTA: (With bravado.) Well, kin he run fast enough, mebby I will marry up with him.

GRAMPAW: (Wrathfully.) Kin he run fast enough, ye'll marry him! I never heard sech foolishment in all my born days!

GRANNY: What an airth do ye mean, Lanta? Ye'll marry him kin he run fast enough?

LANTA: Well, he's been a-pesterin' me to marry up with 'im, an' I tol' him . . . well, I tol' him ef'n he'd run a race with me, an' ef'n he could outrun me . . . well, then I'd marry with him. We're a-goin' to run the race tomorrer.

GRAMPAW: Lanta, I cain't figger you out nohow, passin' up a match like that. Rafe's a fine boy!

LANTA: He shore is a fine boy . . . but how d'ye know I'm a-passin' him up?

GRAMPAW: Ye said ye'd marry him ef'n he could out run ye. Ye know blame' well, he nor no other man in these parts cain't outrun ye.

LANTA: Well . . . I dunno about that . . .

GRANNY: (Sensing something.) What ye mean, Lanta? Ye dunno?

LANTA: (Smiling, and with tenderness in her voice.) Well, I do mortally hate to be outrun by anybody a-tall. But Rafe an' me air a-goin' to race tomorrer, an' ef'n he outruns me I promised cross my heart I'd marry up with 'im, an' . . . an' . . . well, Rafe's a moughty sweet boy, an' he makes me feel all funny inside: shivery like, an' warm all over, all to oncet. Hit hain't lak nothin' ever happen to me afore. An' . . . an' . . . well, I been a-thinkin' that mebby . . . mebby. I won't run so fast tomorrer . . . an' . . . well . . . mebby I'll jest . . . mebby I'll jest let Rafe outrun me . . .

GRANNY: Praise be the Lord! Lanta, I been a-prayin' for this. Ye're all we got lef', an' we'll be a-goin' soon, an' I wanted to see ye pervided for an' raisin' a passel o' younguns o' yer own.

GRAMPAW: Don't ye forgit, now, an' outrun him jest out o' cussedness.
LANTA: Don't ye go a-worryin' yore haid none, Grampaw. I kin run slow when I want to, an' . . . well, this tam . . . well, this is one tam I shore enough want to git beat!

GRAMPAW: Mind ye do, then. I'll be rat glad to see ye safe marrit. Well, hit's tam for supper.

LANTA: What ye got for supper, Granny?

GRANNY: Collard greens an' hog-jowl, with corn bread an' lashin's o' pot-likker.

LANTA: I'm shore hungry.

GRAMPAW: We better git inside, then.

GRANNY: Hit's nelly 'bout dark, an' supper's a-gittin' col'.

(LANTA ENTERS the house. GRANNY rises, follows her in, singing in her high, quavering voice.) My mother, she's gone, she's gone to enter the Golden Gate.

My mother, she's gone, she's gone, she's gone To enter the Golden Gate.
Don't let hit be said, too late, too late, To enter the Golden Gate.
Don't let hit be said, too late, too late, To enter the Golden Gate.

(GRAMPAW, after a few seconds, rises wearily and goes in. The stage is empty for a moment, but GRANNY'S voice is still heard, though muffled; and at the same time there is heard OFF LEFT, coming closer and closer, the tread and shuffle of feet and the heavy "clump-clump" of a walking stick. THE OLD MAN comes in at RIGHT: an aged mountaineer, very stooped and infirm, hobbling and faintly groaning, depending very much upon his walking-stick. Gray hair and whiskers frame his face, and he wears huge silver-rimmed spectacles. He is dressed in very rusty black trousers and a very long black coat and vest, all much too large for him, and hanging on a bony frame in loose folds. Despite his stooped body and worn, old clothes, there is about him an indefinable air of power, a sort of dreadful assurance. He clumps up the steps and knocks lightly and slowly on the door with his knuckles. A pause. No answer. He raps sharply three times with the head of his walking-stick. A sound of movement within . . . a chair being pushed back. But still there is no answer. He seizes his stick below the middle and pounds heavily three times on the door. A short pause.)

End of Script Sample
CHARACTERS:

GRANNY: An aged mountain woman, perhaps no more than 60 or 70, but looking more than this. She wears a plain house-dress of grayish material, with a gingham kitchen apron, perhaps flowered, but not brightly and a dark knitted wool shawl, and an old-fashioned "poke bonnet" of a dull color.

GRAMPAW: An old mountaineer, about the same age as Granny. He wears work shoes or boots, ragged trousers or dungarees, and ragged work shirt. Perhaps an old vest, but no coat.

LANTA: A mountain girl, slim, about 17, tanned, and with a mass of straight black hair hanging loose on her shoulders. She wears a bright, flaunting dress, mostly red with some yellow, which strikes her just at the knee. She is barefoot.

OLD MAN: A mountaineer, apparently, even more aged than Grampaw, stooped and infirm, with a walking-stick. Gray hair and whiskers frame his face, and he wears huge silver-rimmed spectacles. He is dressed in old black trousers and long black coat and vest, all much too large for him, and hanging in loose folds on a bony frame. He wears a white shirt with a black string tie. The general effect is one of shabby respectability, such as might be displayed by a poor mountain preacher of one of the more evangelical sects.

PROPERTIES

Hoe (GRAMPAW)

Triangle (To serve as bell or gong.) This can be made from an iron rod about five feet long and about three-fourths of an inch in diameter, bent into a triangle, open at one end, and hung from a stout cord; or a farm bell can be used, or a large ring of iron, or an old brake-drum. There should also be a large bolt or other piece of metal to use as a striker.

Walking-stick (OLD MAN)

Hand-sickle or reaping-hook. (OLD MAN)
LIGHTS

Late afternoon of a fall day, fading gradually to a deep twilight, but never quite dark. In the last scene, when the OLD MAN appears in the doorway, until CURTAIN, a diffused bluish spot is put on the doorway.

OFFSTAGE SOUND

It will be necessary to have backstage a duplicate triangle (bell, brake drum, or whatever) to be struck at the end of the play when the one on the porch is apparently tolling, struck by no visible hand.

See How Your End's a-Comin' Soon

Slowly, dolefully, plaintively

Oh, sinner don't ye see how yore end's a-comin' soon? O-oh,

sinner don't ye see-ee how yore end's a-comin' soon?

Don't ye see ev-yy day-a-yay how the people's passin' 'way?

See how yore end's a-comin' soon.

The Golden Gate

Slowly, dolefully, plaintively

My mother she's gone, she's gone, she's gone, to enter the

Gold-en Gate. My mother she's gone, she's gone, she's gone, to

enter the Gold-en Gate.
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