

The Quiltmaker

Synopsis:

Life in the poverty-stricken holler of Mud Creek has never been easy and no one knows that better than Ida May, widow of the notoriously abusive moonshiner Luther Combs. Ever since her husband's "accidental" death fifteen years ago, Ida May has supported her family by selling her beautifully crafted, hand-stitched quilts. But things are changing in Mud Creek and none of the changes are to Ida May's liking. Her granddaughter Cindy has married Jackson Bennett, the hated son of a rival moonshining family, and is pregnant with their first child. Ida May's son Ronnie, once more unemployed, is having an affair with his best friend's wife. And Sheriff Ham Terhune, hoping to put an end to an epidemic drug spree sweeping the area, has appointed Jackson to the newly formed Mountain Drug Task Force. As Ida May struggles to maintain control over those she considers "family", Ronnie and Cindy find themselves caught in a web of secrets and lies in which the only way out is to choose between love, loyalty... and life.

Setting: The Combs' cabin in Mud Creek, Kentucky. Present.

Set: the living room. Unit set.

Cast Size: 6 (three women, three men)

Cast: (in order of appearance)

Ida May Combs – the seventy-year-old matriarch of a poor mountain family, she is known for both the beautiful quilts she makes and her waspish tongue. Ida May would do anything for her family – anything – and heaven help those who get in her way.

Juanita Jenkins – a fifty-year-old cosmetics saleswoman famous for her less-than-desirable physical attributes, Juanita is also known as the worst driver in Mud Creek, if not the whole state. She is a good friend to Ida May, though, and willingly takes her wherever she wants to go – including roads better left untraveled.

Cindy Taylor Bennett – Ida May's twenty-eight year old granddaughter. Now that she is a married woman pregnant with her first child, Cindy feels it's high time she learned the truth about her mother's death and other family secrets. She just didn't know there were so *many*...

Jackson Bennett – Cindy's twenty-nine year old husband and a former bootlegger. Jackson has recently been made a deputy and is surprised to discover he loves the law almost as much as his wife's grandmother hates it – and him.

Ronnie Combs – Ida May's fifty-something son. A self-proclaimed failure, Ronnie nonetheless possesses a kind heart and has done his best to help raise his niece Cindy.

Ham Terhune – a former schoolmate of Ronnie's and the current sheriff, Ham finds himself in the middle of the state's worst prescription drug crisis in history. He plans to win both the battle against drug abuse and his reelection campaign – or die trying.

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SETTING: *The living room of the Combs home, a poor mountain cabin in the rural hamlet of Mud Creek, KY. There are three doors – one leading to the front porch, one leading to the kitchen/bedrooms and one leading to the house’s most recent addition, a bathroom. There is a wood-burning stove and the furniture includes a rocking chair and a cracked leather couch with an afghan draped over it. A beautiful “Sunburst” quilt hangs on one wall. Leaning against the wall next to the front door is a wooden ladder. Above the entrance to the kitchen is a small door that leads to an attic space. It should be noted that although this is a poor home, it is a neat home.*

AT RISE: *A warm summer’s day. The front door is open, revealing a somewhat tattered screen door. IDA MAY COMBS, a seventy-something grandmother and owner of the cabin, is seated in the rocking chair piecing together a new quilt. We hear the sound of a car approaching rapidly. IDA looks up from her work and listens intently. We hear the squeal of tires as the car rounds a curve. Recognizing the car by its sound, IDA goes back to her work. We hear the car screech to a halt and a chicken squawk in fear.*

IDA

(Shaking her head)

It’s a wonder she ain’t kilt nobody yet.

(JUANITA JENKINS appears on the porch. She yells through the door.)

JUANITA

Ida May? You home?

IDA

Where else would I be?

(JUANITA *enters carrying a cosmetics sample case.*)

IDA (cont.)

It's a wonder you ain't kilt nobody yet, Juanita.

JUANITA

What're you talkin' about?

IDA

Your drivin'. I reckon the biggest mistake them cosmetic folks ever did was give you that fancy car. It's like puttin' a loaded gun in the hands of a two-year-old.

JUANITA

I drive just fine, thank you.

IDA

That ain't what Darryl Webb said when you parked your car in his livin' room.

JUANITA

That warn't my fault, Ida May. I was just tryin' to avoid hittin' that big, dumb hound dog of his. And dang if I didn't warn Darryl after I kilt the first two that he needed to keep them dogs penned up. But he didn't listen and sure 'nough that dumb coon hound started chasin' my car again... It was either the dog or the house. I reckon I did the Christian thing and hit the house.

IDA

Yessir. A loaded gun.

(JUANITA *puts down her sample case and heads toward the kitchen.*)

JUANITA

You got a CoCola? The air conditioner's broke down in my car and it's hot as hell out there.

IDA

In the Frigidaire.

(JUANITA *exits into the kitchen.* IDA *continues her sewing.*)

JUANITA (O.S.)

Why is it, I wonder, that air conditioners always pick summertime to break down in? Seems to me wintertime would be... What on earth?

(JUANITA *reappears in the doorway holding a soft drink can.*)

JUANITA (cont.)

What the hell is this?

IDA

A CoCola.

JUANITA

No it ain't. It's a *diet* CoCola what tastes like the bottom of an outhouse! Who put this in your Frigidaire is what I'd like to know.

IDA

Cindy, I reckon. Her and Jackson went to the grocery for me a few days back.

JUANITA

Ida May, listen to me. Never, *never* let your grandchildren do your food shoppin' for you. They don't know nothin' about nutrition. Oh, they run on all the time 'bout your cholesterol level and blood enzymes and what not, but before you know it, with them in charge, you're eatin' *margarine* and *low-fat* mayonnaise and drinkin' diet CoCola what tastes like the bottom of an outhouse. Then you wake up one mornin' weighin' sixty pound lookin' like one of them poor African children you see in them ads in *People* magazine and they rush you to the hospital and the doctor tells you you're sufferin' from malnutrition.

(JUANITA *pops the top and takes a long drink.*)

And then you die.

IDA

I ain't too worried 'bout Cindy tryin' to kill me.

JUANITA

Why not?

IDA

Because I'm her family. And family don't hurt family, leastways not in my house.

JUANITA

What about Luther?

(JUANITA *finishes off the can.* IDA *looks up.*)

IDA

What about him?

JUANITA

It's just that there was a lot of talk when Luther died. Some folks like to think maybe you kilt him.

IDA

What folks? Folks like *you*, maybe?

JUANITA

No... but I wouldn't blame you none if you did. Lord knows I hate to speak ill of the dead, but Luther Combs was a no-good, wife-beatin' drunk and why you put up with him as long as you did is beyond me.

IDA

You know very well that Luther Combs got liquored up, walked out in the middle of the woods and shot his stupid self. It's in the public record. And just because folks talk, Juanita, don't mean you have to listen none.

JUANITA

Well, hell, don't get in a tear about it. I only brought it up because you was sayin' all that about how in your house family don't hurt family...

IDA

Luther warn't family. Luther was my husband. Family is *blood*, younguns and whatnot. None of my younguns would ever hurt me and I'd never hurt none of them. No mommy would.

JUANITA

Well, now, I don't know about that. I recall one day in high school learnin' all about some Greek mommy who done kilt her children.

IDA

What are you talkin' about? There ain't no Greeks in Mud Creek, Kentucky!

JUANITA

Well, hell – I know that, Ida May! Ain't I lived here all my life, just like you? These folks lived in "A-thens". That's a town way over near Lexington. Anyway, this Greek mommy – her name was "Medalia" – she had some sort of complex. Y'know? One of them psychiatric things Oprah likes to run on about?

IDA

Who's Oprah? Another Greek?

JUANITA

Lord no! Oprah's that big, black gal what has her own talk show on television. Ain't you never seen the Oprah show, Ida May?

IDA

Girl, you know I cain't watch nothin' up here. We ain't got no reception.

JUANITA

Well, why ain't you got you a satellite dish yet? It ain't like you cain't afford one these days...

(JUANITA tapers off when IDA looks at her.)

IDA

The Combs family ain't nothin' but poor mountain folk, Juanita. The only money we got comin' in is from what quilts I can get sold off. Remember that.

JUANITA

Yes, ma'am.

(IDA looks back to her sewing.)

IDA

Now tell me some more 'bout this here Greek woman.

JUANITA

That's right. Medalia. So, Medalia was married to this fella named "Edpus" and Edpus was so ornery that he give Medalia what they call an "Edpus complex" and... oh! I almost forgot the most important part. Edpus and Medalia also had them a daughter named "Electronic". Or was it "Electricity"...?

IDA

What kind of fool name is that? That ain't in the Bible.

JUANITA

Them Greeks don't set much store by Bible names. They ain't Christian like us. I reckon they're A-rabs...or Catholic, maybe. Anyway, Edpus and Medalia have this daughter named Electronic and by and by she grows up until one day Edpus falls in love with her.

IDA

Her own daddy falls in love with her?

JUANITA

Yep. And get this – Electronic falls in love with him, too.

IDA

Where'd you say these folks was from...?

JUANITA

'Course when Medalia her mommy found out 'bout the whole thing she was madder'n hell and she up and shot Electronic. Just like that. Shot her dead.

IDA

She kilt her own child?

JUANITA

Yep. Boom, boom. Right between the eyes.

IDA

Well, that ain't right, shootin' her own blood like that...

JUANITA

Of course it ain't. The Bible says "Thou shalt not kill"...

IDA

She should've kilt her husband. She should've blowed his damn head off. That's what I'd've done....

(IDA goes back to her sewing. JUANITA studies her a moment.)

JUANITA

Huh.

(Beat. Suddenly she stands up and heads for the kitchen.)

I need another CoCola. You want one?

IDA

No.

(JUANITA exits into the kitchen.)

JUANITA (O.S.)

Where's Ronnie at? Workin'?

IDA

Hell, no. He done hurt his back again

(JUANITA reappears in the doorway with a soft drink can. She pops the lid.)

JUANITA

Seems like Ronnie's back's been hurt most of his life.

IDA

He's a weak man, like his daddy.

JUANITA

Maybe. But I'm thinkin' it all started with that time when we was in high school and a bunch of us went drinkin' and Ronnie ended up fallin' out of Birddog's pickup truck and landin' smack on that big rock what's on the side of Dobb's Road. Lord, was he ever hurt bad! Lord, was we ever *drunk*! Back in them days I could put away so much beer they called me "The Keg Queen". Huh...

(She takes a sip of her drink.)

Where is he, then, if he ain't workin'?

IDA

He went over to McKee to see the doctor.

JUANITA

The one you see for your arthritis?

IDA

Yep. I told Ronnie to ask for the same prescription.

(JUANITA starts to laugh and shakes her head. We hear the sound of a car approaching. IDA looks up and listens for a moment.)

That's Jackson's truck. You got somethin' for me?

JUANITA

Oh, lord. I plumb forgot. Here...

(She opens her sample case, takes out a bottle of hand lotion and gives it to IDA. IDA holds it in her hand for a moment as if weighing it.)

IDA

It seems lighter than usual.

JUANITA

Well, it ain't. There's just as much in there as there's always been.

(IDA stands up stiffly, rubbing her knees.)

IDA

I'll be right back.

(IDA exits into the bathroom and closes the door. JUANITA drains her drink then heads to the kitchen for yet another one. We hear the approaching truck stop. Two figures appear on the porch, JACKSON BENNETT and his wife, CINDY TAYLOR BENNETT. They are both in their late twenties. CINDY opens the door and pokes her head in.)

CINDY

Granny?

(She enters. JACKSON follows her in wearing a ball cap. JUANITA reappears from the kitchen.)

Oh, hey, Juanita.

JUANITA

My lord, Cindy Taylor, if you ain't the spittin' image of your mommy. I coulda swore for a second there that Janelle herself was comin' through that door...

(She hugs CINDY.)

Hey there, Jackson.

JACKSON

Hey, Juanita. Kilt any more dogs lately?

JUANITA

Not lately. How's your daddy? He outta the hospital yet?

JACKSON

Comin' home tomorrow.

JUANITA

That was a mighty bad accident, havin' that still blow up in his face like that. He was lucky he ain't blowed up with it.

CINDY

Juanita, where's Granny? I got somethin' to show her...

(We hear a toilet flush. IDA enters from the bathroom.)

Hey, Granny.

IDA

(To JACKSON)

Take your hat off in the house, boy. Ain't your mommy learned you no better?

(JACKSON removes his cap. CINDY kisses IDA on the cheek.)

How's my girl?

CINDY

Just fine. Hey, guess what I...?

IDA

You ain't been bothered none by the mornin' sickness, have you?

JUANITA

Mornin' sickness? Well now, Cindy – are you pregnant finally?

CINDY

Yes, ma'am, I am.

JUANITA

That's wonderful. Why ain't you told me, Ida May?

(IDA retakes her seat in the rocking chair.)

IDA

I ain't had the chance. You was too busy runnin' on about that Greek gal Oprah...

JUANITA

I done told you a thousand times, Oprah ain't a Greek!

IDA

Oh, that's right. She's a colored.

JACKSON

Now, Ida May, I reckon you don't know this, you bein' uneducated and all, but you ain't allowed to call 'em *colored* these days. These days you have to call 'em *blacks* or *African-Americans*. I learned me that up at the Federal Penitentiary.

IDA

What the hell are you talkin' about?

CINDY

He's right, Granny. Callin' folks *colored* ain't political. You cain't do it no more.

IDA

Says who? I been callin' 'em *colored* all my life and I reckon I'll do it to the day I die.

CINDY

But I don't want you sayin' things that ain't political in front of my baby!

IDA

That baby cain't hear nothin' yet!

CINDY

Oh yes it can. I read about it in a magazine. Some doctors say a baby can hear just about as soon as it's conceived.

IDA

That's the damn dumbest thing I ever heard in my life.

CINDY

No it ain't. And another thing – I don't want you cussin' no more in front of my baby neither. I won't even let Jackson do it.

JACKSON

She makes me pay her fifty cent every time I slip. I swear that child's gonna have it's college education paid for before it's even born.

IDA

A Bennett? Goin' to college?

CINDY

That's right. We're gonna give this baby all the opportunity we never got. What do you have to say about that?

IDA

Shit...