

# Luke Meets the Revenue Man

Written by Arthur Hopkins in 1919. Adapted by David K. Farkas.

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"Moonshine" is available in B. Roland Lewis, *Contemporary One-Act Plays*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.

[www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37970](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37970).

An audio recording is available in Librivox.org, One Act Plays, volume 007. 14:05 minutes.

<https://librivox.org/one-act-play-collection-007-by-various>

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## **Characters:**

**Luke Hazy:** A moonshiner.

**A Revenue Officer.**

Deep in the mountains of North Carolina, moonshiner Luke Hazy sits at a crude table in his one-room cabin. There is a second chair, a cupboard with a jug of moonshine whiskey, and perhaps other items. On a wall is a faded newspaper photograph of a well-dressed man. LUKE holds an old-style revolver.

A commotion is heard outside the cabin.

**LUKE:** (*Looking offstage.*) It's all right, boys . . . Jist leave him to me. Git in here, Mister Revenue Man.

The REVENUE MAN is shoved roughly through the doorway. He wears city attire but has no hat. His clothes are dusty. He speaks as a Northerner and is educated. LUKE, a lanky, ill-dressed Southerner, motions with the barrel of his pistol for the stranger to take a seat. (It may be necessary for LUKE to close the door.)

**LUKE:** You must excuse the boys for gettin' a little rough. You see they don't come across you revenue fellers very often, and they kinda got excited.

**RM:** I understand.

More commotion and a gunshot.

**LUKE:** *(Barely reacting.)* That was quite a handsome firearm they took from you. Boys are probably tryin' to determine who's gonna keep it.

**RM:** I would hate to be the cause of any dissension . . . uh . . . trouble . . . among the boys.

Another gunshot.

**LUKE:** *(Again barely reacting.)* Well, that just can't be helped. Won't yer sit down?

**RM:** *(Sitting.)* Thank you.

**LUKE:** *(Going over to cupboard and taking out jug.)* We wus hopin' you might be Jim Dunn. Have a drink?

**RM:** *(Starts slightly at mention of JIM DUNN.)* No, thank you. Your mountain liquor is too rough for me.

**LUKE:** *(Draining cup.)* Rough? T'ain't rough. Ye just don't like the flavor of liquor that hain't been stamped.

**RM:** Maybe so.

**LUKE:** It's bad manners to drink alone when you got company. Please have some.

**RM:** Very well, my friend. I suffer willingly.

Drinks a little and chokes.

**RM:** It's not so bad.

**LUKE:** The last revenue man that sat in that chair got good and drunk on my hooch.

**RM:** That wouldn't be difficult.

**LUKE:** No, but it wuz awkward.

**RM:** Why?

**LUKE:** I had to wait till he sobered up before I give him his bullet. Don't like the idea of sending a man to meet his maker while he's drunk.

**RM:** Thoughtful executioner.

**LUKE:** I'm mighty sorry you ain't Jim Dunn. But I reckon you ain't. You don't answer his likeness.

**RM:** *(Again starts slightly at the mention of JIM DUNN.)* Who's Jim Dunn?

**LUKE:** You ought to know who Jim Dunn is. He's just the most notorious revenue man that ever hit these parts. *(Points to newspaper photograph on back wall.)* He's a smart one. Put a lot of moonshiners in jail. And when the occasion calls fer it, he's good with a gun too. We figure he's due here sooner or later, and we got a little reception all ready for him.

**RM:** *(Looking at photograph.)* That's Jim Dunn?

**LUKE:** Yep.

**RM:** *(Rising, examining picture.)* Doesn't look much like anyone.

**LUKE:** That's cause the picture's been up on that wall a long time . . . I'm mighty sorry you hain't Jim Dunn.

**RM:** I'm sorry to disappoint you.

**LUKE:** Oh, it's all right. I reckon one revenue man's about as good as another.

**RM:** What makes you sure I'm a revenue officer?

**LUKE:** Well, since we ketched ye climin' trees an' snoopin' round the stills, I reckon we won't take no chances that you hain't.

**RM:** Oh. Well, you do have pretty good evidence. I'll say that myself.

**LUKE:** So, what's your name, Mr. Revenue Man?

**RM:** I'm "Diego Oscuro." Pleased to get better acquainted with you.

**LUKE:** Dee-egg -oh? O-scur-o.

**RM:** Sorry about those unfamiliar sounds. I'm from New York City. My father was Spanish. "Diego" is like "James." I won't trouble you about "Oscuro." My father had a business importing wine. But in New York City everyone pays the tax.

**LUKE:** How 'bout that! (*Laughing.*) Not here. In these parts, payin' the tax isn't just an expense, it's an embarrassment. Yeh, know, I'm just gonna trip over "Dee-egg-oh," so I'm gonna just say "Mister Revenue" . . . for the duration of our acquaintance. Luke Hazy is my name. Please do call me "Luke." I want you to feel like you had a friend with you at the end.

**RM:** (*Starting as though interested.*) Not the Luke Hazy that cleaned out the Crosby family?

**LUKE:** (*Startled and draws revolver.*) How'd you hear about that?

**RM:** Hear about it? Why, your name's been in every newspaper in the United States. Every time you kill another Crosby the whole feud is told all over again. Why, I've seen your picture in the papers twenty times.

**LUKE:** Hain't never had one took.

**RM:** Don't you ever read the newspapers?

**LUKE:** Me read? I hain't read nothin' fer thirty years. Reckon I couldn't read two lines in an hour.

**RM:** You've missed a lot of information about yourself.

**LUKE:** How many Crosbys they say I killed?

**RM:** I think the last report said you had just removed the twelfth.

**LUKE:** It's a lie! I only killed six . . . that's all they wuz growed up. I'm a-waitin' fer one now that's only thirteen.

**RM:** When'll he be ripe?

**LUKE:** Jes as soon as he comes a-lookin' fer me.

**RM:** Will he come?

**LUKE:** He'll come if he's a Crosby.

**RM:** A brave family?

**LUKE:** They don't make 'em any braver—they'd be first-rate folks if they wuzn't Crosbys.

**RM:** If you feel that way, why did you start fighting them?

**LUKE:** I never started no fight. My granddad had some misunderstandin' with their granddad. I don't know jes what it wuz about, but I reckon my granddad wuz right, and I'll see it through.

**RM:** You must think a lot of your grandfather.

**LUKE:** Never seen 'im, but I ain't goin' agin my own kin . . . Won't ye have another drink?

**RM:** No—no—thank you.

**LUKE:** Well, Mr. Revenue Man, I reckon we might as well have this over.

**RM:** What?

**LUKE:** Well, you know. The killin' part. I mean I gotta kill you.

**RM:** That's OK. That's why I'm here.

**LUKE:** What do yu mean?

**RM:** I mean that I've been trying to commit suicide for the last two months, but I haven't had the nerve.

**LUKE:** (*Startled.*) Suicide?

**RM:** Yes. Now that you're willing to kill me, the problem is solved.

**LUKE:** Why, what d'ye want to commit suicide fer?

**RM:** I just want to stop living, that's all.

**LUKE:** Well, yu must have a reason.

**RM:** No special reason—I find life dull, and I'd like to get out of it.

**LUKE:** Dull?

**RM:** Yes—I hate to go to bed, and I hate to get up. My work is a farce. I chase around these hills lookin' for moonshiners but nothin' really comes of it. There's always going to be more to take their place. I see by the fate of my friends that love brings only disappointment and sadness. Injustice is everywhere. The crafty schemer gets the money and the glory, while the fair-minded dealer is humiliated in the bankruptcy court. In the name of the law every crime is committed; in the name of religion every vice is indulged; in the name of education the greatest ignorance is rampant.

**LUKE:** I don't git all of that, but I reckon you're some put out.

**RM:** I am. The world's a failure, and I'm just aching to get out of it . . . And you, my friend, are my opportunity.

**LUKE:** Yes, I reckon you'll get your wish now.

**RM:** Good . . . if you only knew how I've tried to get myself killed.

**LUKE:** Well, why didn't you kill yerself?

**RM:** I was afraid.

**LUKE:** Afreed o' what—hurtin' yourself?

**RM:** No, afraid of the consequences.

**LUKE:** Whad d'ye mean?

**RM:** Do you believe in another life after this one?

**LUKE:** I kan't say ez I ever give it much thought.

**RM:** Well, don't—because if you do you'll never kill another Crosby, or even a revenue officer.

**LUKE:** 'Tain't that bad, is it?

**RM:** Worse. Twenty times I've had a revolver to my head—crazy to die—and then as my finger rested on the trigger, I'd get a terrible dread—a dread that I was plunging into worse terrors than this world ever knew. If killing were the end, it would be easy, but what if it's only the beginning of something worse?

**LUKE:** Well, you gotta take some chances.

**RM:** I'll not take that one. You know, Mr. Luke, life was given to us by someone who probably never intended that we should take it, and that someone probably has something ready for people who destroy his property. That's what frightens me.

**LUKE:** You do too much worryin' to be a regular suicide.

**RM:** Yes, I do. That's why I changed my plan. I'm going to make someone *else* responsible for my dying. I've been exposing myself to every danger I could think of.

**LUKE:** What ye mean by that?

**RM:** Well, did you ever see an automobile?

**LUKE:** No.

**RM:** They go faster than steam engines, and they don't stay on tracks. Did you ever hear of Fifth Avenue, New York?

**LUKE:** No.

**RM:** Fifth Avenue is jammed with automobiles, eight deep all day long. People being killed every day. I crossed Fifth Avenue every day for weeks, never once trying to get out of the way, and always praying I'd be hit.

**LUKE:** And couldn't yu git hit?

**RM:** (*In disgust.*) No. Automobiles only hit people who try to get out of the way. (*Pause.*) When that failed, I frequented the lowest dives on the Bowery, flashing a roll of money and wearing diamonds, hoping they'd kill me for them. They stole the money and diamonds, but never touched me.

**LUKE:** Couldn't you pick a fight?

**RM:** I'm coming to that. You know Two Gun Jake that keeps the dive down in Henderson?

**LUKE:** I do . . . Jake's killed enough fellers to git attention.

**RM:** He's a bad man, ain't he?

**LUKE:** He's no trifler.

**RM:** I wound up in Jake's place two nights ago. I elbowed my way up to the bar and announced to everyone in the place that Jake's wife has been with every man in town. And she does it because Jake can't do nothin' in bed.

**LUKE:** That shudda got Jake mad enough to kill yu.

**RM:** Well, he might still get around to it, but he went off and killed his wife instead. So he's in jail now.

**LUKE:** That's just plain bad luck.

**RM:** I decided that you moonshiners were my best chance. So I scrambled around in the mountains until I found your still and waited until your boys showed up.

**LUKE:** (*Pause.*) Ah, so ye want us to do yer killin' fer ye, do ye?

**RM:** You're my last hope. If I fail this time, I may as well give it up.

**LUKE:** *(Takes out revolver, turns sideways and secretly removes cartridges from the chamber.)* What wuz that noise?

Lays revolver on table and steps outside the cabin. The REVENUE MAN looks at revolver, apparently without interest. LUKE quickly re-enters and expresses surprise at seeing that the REVENUE MAN made no attempt to secure the revolver. Feigning excitement, he goes to the table and picks up the gun.

**LUKE:** I reckon I'm gettin' careless, leavin' a gun layin' around here that-a-way. Didn't you see it?

**RM:** Yes.

**LUKE:** Well, why didn't ye grab it?

**RM:** What for?

**LUKE:** To git the drop on me.

**RM:** Don't you understand what I've been telling you, Luke? I don't want the drop on you.

**LUKE:** Well, doggone if I don't believe yer tellin' me the truth. Thought I'd just see what ye'd do. Ye see, I emptied it first.

Opens up revolver.

**RM:** That wasn't necessary.

**LUKE:** Well, I reckon ye better git along out o' here, Mister Revenue.

**RM:** You don't mean you're weakening?

**LUKE:** I ain't got no call to do your killin' fer you if ye hain't sport enough to do it yerself.

**RM:** But one murder more or less means nothing to you. You don't care anything about the hereafter.

**LUKE:** Mebbe I don't, but there ain't no use my takin' any more chances than I have to. And what's more, mister, from what you been tellin' me, I reckon there's a charm on you, and I ain't goin' to take no chances goin' agin charms.

**RM:** So, you're going to go back on me?

**LUKE:** Yes, siree.

**RM:** Well, maybe some of the other boys will be willing. I'll wait till they come.

**LUKE:** The other boys ain't even gonna see you. You're a leavin' this here place right now. Ye ain't got no right to expect us to bear yer burdens.

**RM:** Damn it all! I've spoiled it again.

**LUKE:** Come on, I'll let you ride my horse to town. It's the only one we got, so yu can leave it at Two Gun Jake's, and one o' the boys'll go git it.

**RM:** I suppose it's no use arguing with you.

**LUKE:** Not a bit. Come on.

**RM:** Well, I'd like to leave my address so if you ever come to New York you can look me up.

**LUKE:** 'Tain't likely I'll ever come to New York.

**RM:** Well, I'll leave it, anyhow. Have you a piece of paper?

**LUKE:** Paper what you write on? Never had no paper.

REVENUE MAN takes Jim Dunn's picture from the wall.

**RM:** If you don't mind, I'll put it on the back of Jim Dunn's picture. *(Places picture on table.)* I'll print it for you, so it'll be easy to read.

REVENUE MAN prints on the back of the picture.

**LUKE:** All right—come on now.

Both go to doorway. LUKE extends his hand. *REVENUE MAN takes it.*

**LUKE:** Good-bye, mister—cheer up. There's the horse.

**RM:** Good-bye. *(Shaking LUKE'S hand.)*

LUKE watches for a while as the REVENUE MAN rides down the mountain. Then he hears loud laughter.

**RM:** *(Laughing still louder and calling.)* Farewell, my friend. Perhaps we'll meet another day.

**LUKE:** *(To himself.)* Now what does he mean by that?

**RM:** *(Shouting louder)* Lu-uke, loook aht the pict-tuure!

LUKE pauses for a moment, then returns to the table, takes a drink, picks up the picture, and turns it around several times before noticing the writing on the back. Then he begins to study. Attempting to make out the name, he slowly traces in the air with his index finger a capital "J"—then mutters "J-J-J"; then traces the letter "I"—mutter "I-I-I"; then a letter "M"—muttering "M-M-M, J-I-M—J-I-M—JIM." In the same way he traces and mutters D-U-N-N."

**LUKE:** Jim Dunn! By God! Ha! Ha! Whatta feller. Well, the joke's on me today. But mebbe we'll meet again. I'll have no trouble recognizin' him next time.

***The End***