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Dramatic Publishing

Ladies of the Tower

by **TIM KELLY** and **RUTH PERRY**



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TIM KELLY

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(LADIES OF THE TOWER)

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LADIES OF THE TOWER

A Drama in One Act

For Nine Girls

CHARACTERS

THE CLEANING WOMEN:

MAUDIE

LAURETTE

THE "OTHER" LADIES OF THE TOWER:

UNKNOWN WOMAN

QUEEN ANNE BOLEYN

QUEEN CATHERINE HOWARD

LADY JANE GREY

LADY ARABELLA STUART

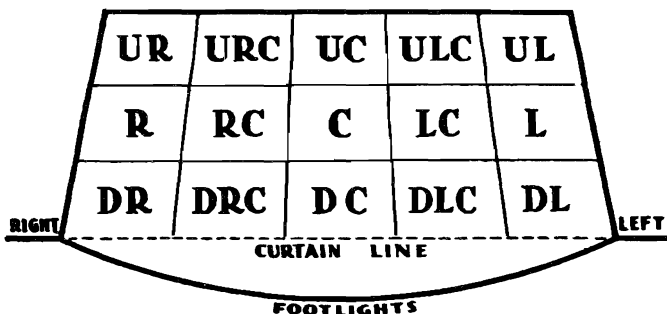
LADY ROCHFORD

QUEEN MOTHER ELIZABETH

PLACE: *A room in the Tower of London.*

TIME: *The present.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

Ladies of the Tower

(SCENE: A cold and forbidding room in the Tower of London. The bare stage, dimly lighted, will suffice. There are seven stools placed in a semicircle at extreme DR, DRC, R, URC, ULC, L, DL. At approximately stage C is a beheading block made of wood.)

(AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The stage remains empty for several seconds. From off L comes the sound of a door being opened. MAUDIE, an elderly cleaning woman, enters followed by a young girl, LAURETTE. Both wear aprons and have kerchiefs on their heads. They carry mops and pails, etc. MAUDIE wears an old gray cardigan which has grown a bit small for her; a button is missing. LAURETTE also wears a cardigan, utilitarian but becoming. When she enters it is unbuttoned. She is careful to turn back her cuffs before starting work. MAUDIE also manages to hold a lighted lantern, and when she enters the general stage lighting fades up somewhat. She sets the lantern on the floor, L, and rubs the small of her back.)

MAUDIE. Them stairs!

LAURETTE: Your back again, Maudie?

MAUDIE: Stairs and me back don't get along. (Looks around.) I'm grateful this place don't get cleaned too often. It's one room in the Tower

of London they don't show. Thank heaven!

LAURETTE (looking around). Why's that?

MAUDIE. 'Cause the dead got rights same as the living. (LAURETTE steps closer to MAUDIE; she is nervous.)

LAURETTE (incredulous). Did you say--the dead's got rights?

MAUDIE. I did. All they want--most of'm--'s a bit of rest, poor things.

LAURETTE. Most of them--but the others?

MAUDIE. Ah, them! Queens and ladies and the like that had so much! Rest don't content them! They want back what they had: the fine clothes and the jewels, the "Yes, my lady" and "As you command, my lady," (Glances about uneasily.) No wonder they walk this gloomy place night after night!

LAURETTE. You mean you've seen them--yourself?

MAUDIE. With my own eyes. (Moves R, points to spot on floor near the block.) You see that stain?

LAURETTE. I do.

MAUDIE. Some say it's the blood of Anne Boleyn, or Catherine Howard or maybe even Lady Jane Grey. 'Twon't wash away.

LAURETTE (briskly). I'll start with it. We'll see. (To business.) Will you work here?

MAUDIE. No. I got the Chapel floor to do. I'll come back for you.

(Enter the UNKNOWN WOMAN. She is plainly dressed in gray cotton or some neutral color such as might have been standard prison dress for unimportant inmates of the Tower. Her drab hair is combed back into a simple knot. Although she might have been beautiful in other circumstances, she seems pallid and timid,

and the effect is of anonymity. She pauses a moment near MAUDIE and LAURETTE, listening, as if eager for companionship. The two do not see the UNKNOWN WOMAN but seem to react to some atmospheric change.)

MAUDIE (pulling the collar of her cardigan closer). It's chilly. (Going.) You won't be frightened?

LAURETTE (buttoning her cardigan). You mean-- (Uneasily.)--I might see something myself? Here? Tonight? (The UNKNOWN WOMAN shakes her head sadly, and as if following a weary routine, exits.)

MAUDIE. Likely you will. But not clear--and you won't hardly hear what's said and they won't know you're here. They won't hinder the work none. (Crosses DL and turns.) Like I say, it takes a lifetime to get used to the Tower. (MAUDIE exits. LAURETTE stares after her, shrugs, drops to her knees, dips a brush into the bucket and begins to scrub the stain, talking to herself as she works.)

LAURETTE. Maudie's simple. The dead got rights, she says. (Mimicking Maudie.) "All they wants is a bit of rest." Don't we all. (Stops.) Hmmm. That's odd. (Scrubs harder.) The stain's still here----

(Now we hear MALE VOICES, unreal and mysterious at first, then strong and commanding.)

VOICE 1 (from off R). Anne Boleyn, come into the courtroom!

(LAURETTE rises, startled, and stares around, bewildered. Enter ANNE BOLEYN, DL, beautiful, changeable in mood, sometimes haughty and sometimes gentle, dressed in a period gown. She has black hair and is still in her twenties. Neither woman clearly sees the other but each senses an alien presence. ANNE pauses and unconsciously raises her hands defensively to her throat.)

ANNE. I won't look at it tonight. And yet, why not? It's only an ugly block of wood! (Turns and looks at the block.) I, to be a Queen and so cruelly handled! Such a thing was never seen before!

LAURETTE (who has returned to her scrubbing, giving the block a little push). I won't work near you--you ugly piece of wood! (Picks up her cleaning utensils and crosses out of the way and resumes work. ANNE sits on stool.)

VOICE 2 (from off L). Catherine Howard, come into the courtroom!

LAURETTE (rocking back on her heels, frightened). Who's speaking?

(Enter UR CATHERINE HOWARD. She is about twenty, petite, gay, loving joy and ready for any mischief. She had no more fear in risking Henry's wrath by a stolen kiss or flirtation than the average girl fears the anger of a strict parent. If historic exactitude is desired, she may wear auburn hair or a wig of that color. Like all the ladies of the Tower, CATHERINE walks slowly in stately fashion, seeming a dream figure

from the past. But occasionally a glint appears of the coquettish girl that captivated Henry. She crosses and sits URC.)

ANNE. Your Highness, is there a living person here?

CATHERINE. Only a servant--a charwoman.

ANNE (sadly). Perhaps she fears ghosts and the thought of death---Alas, death comes to all--servants and queens.

CATHERINE. Common folk have no feelings.

VOICE 1 (off R). Lady Jane Grey, come into the courtroom!

LAURETTE (indignant). Common folk have no feelings! Ah, well, Maudie said "Pay no attention." (Resumes work.)

(Enter LADY JANE GREY. She is sixteen. In an eerie way, she still seems young and beautiful. She sits on the stool DR.)

LADY JANE. The cruel block! It symbolizes death. It rules this Tower! And it rules us!

VOICE 2 (off L). Lady Arabella Stuart, come into the courtroom!

(Enter LADY ARABELLA STUART, beautiful, aristocratic, and in her late thirties. There is something distraught and apprehensive in her manner, and a slight disarrangement of her hair and dress which suggests the madness which afflicted her when she was separated from her husband and imprisoned for four years in the semi-darkness of the Tower.)

LADY ARABELLA. Ladies, is this Oxford? My husband is a student at Oxford. (Wrings

her hands in troubled fashion.) I'm trying to find my husband, William Seymour----

LADY JANE (gently). No, madam, this is London. The Tower of London.

LADY ARABELLA (almost a wail). The Tower again! Four long years I was shut inside these dreary walls. (Draws herself up proudly.) I, the cousin of King James the First of England!

ANNE (indicating stool L). Sit here, Lady Arabella. (Kindly.) Rest yourself.

LADY ARABELLA (with murmured thanks, sitting on stool L; half whispering). They said I was mad--it wasn't true! . . . Was it?

LADY JANE (consolingly). No, no. Wise men say that there's only a thin line between sanity and madness and most of us cross that border many times.

LADY ARABELLA (laughs trillingly). Then, if I'm mad, the others are too! (Tosses back her head.)

VOICE 1 (from off R). Lady Rochford, come into the courtroom!

(The voices terrify LAURETTE. She rises to her feet and turns one way and then the other. Enter LADY ROCHFORD UR. She is eighteen and there is something gay and mischievous in her manner. She has a smiling, alert look and sees life as a frolic, which is suddenly, unaccountably, ended in tragedy. She is Lady-in-Waiting to Queen CATHERINE HOWARD. She crosses to her.)

LADY ROCHFORD. Madam, I'm sorry to be late attending you.