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Dramatic Publishing

A Comedy In One Act

The Tale That Wagged The Dog

By
Tim Kelly



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A TALE THAT WAGGED THE DOG
A Comedy in One Act
For One Man and Four Women

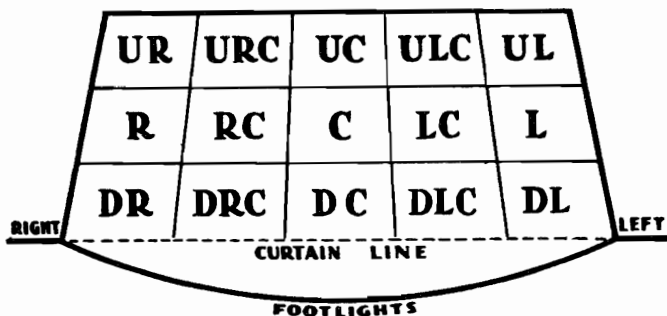
C H A R A C T E R S

- RUDOLPH *valet to Johann Strauss*
TRUDI *his wife*
ARABELLA *a young girl*
CHARITY *an intelligent woman*
PRUDENCE *another young woman*

PLACE: *Sitting room of a hotel suite in Boston.*

TIME: *Before the turn of the century.*

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.

The Tale That Wagged The Dog

SCENE: The sitting room of a hotel suite in Boston, 1872. There is a chair DR, another DL. At UL there is a dressing screen, and UC a table with a vase of flowers on it. Other furnishings may be added as desired, to further dress the stage. The entrance from the hotel corridor is at L, and a door R leads to other rooms of the suite.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: It is morning. RUDOLPH, the valet to Johann Strauss, enters R, putting on his jacket and humming a Strauss waltz, probably "The Blue Danube." He moves DC. The voice of his wife Trudi cuts in from offstage R.)

TRUDI. Rudolph! (He goes right on humming, buttoning his jacket. He hasn't heard.)
Rudolph! (This time he hears. He stops humming, frowns.)

RUDOLPH. Yes, my dear?

TRUDI (from off R). Stop humming!

RUDOLPH. I'm not humming now.

TRUDI (from off R). Good.

RUDOLPH. Anyway, my dear, it was one of the maestro's own waltzes. (Steps R.) It wasn't as if I were humming someone else's work.

TRUDI (from off R). Humming is humming. Don't do it.

RUDOLPH (faking a smile). All right, my dear.

You'll never hear another hum out of me.
(Frowns again, straightens the chair DR,
mimics her voice.) "Humming is humming."
(Sotto.) How would she know? She can't tell
the difference between a polka and a funeral
march.

(ARABELLA enters L, surreptitiously.)

ARABELLA. Psssssst. (RUDOLPH looks up,
startled.)

RUDOLPH. I didn't hear you knock.

ARABELLA. I didn't. I just walked in. (ARABELLA
is a silly girl, inclined to be giddy.)

RUDOLPH (moving C). Everywhere I go, it's the
same thing. The ladies simply will not leave
Herr Strauss alone. I thought Boston would be
different. I must ask you to leave, Miss --
uh----

ARABELLA. Parkhurst. Arabella Parkhurst.
(RUDOLPH moves to show her out. She moves
in front of the chair DL, RUDOLPH following.
She crosses C, talking as she does.) Oh,
please, don't make me leave. Not until I've
gotten what I've come for.

RUDOLPH. If you want an autographed picture of
the maestro, I suggest you write a letter like
any other well-bred Boston lady.

ARABELLA (strong). I'm not like any other well-
bred Boston lady.

RUDOLPH. Obviously, considering the way you
walk into rooms where you have no business.

ARABELLA. You're Rudolph.

RUDOLPH (preening). I have that honor. Valet to
Johann Strauss. (Thinks.) How did you know
my name?

ARABELLA. When a woman is determined, she

discovers a great many things.

RUDOLPH. The maestro never sees anyone without an appointment. You're wasting your time.

Besides, he's not here. He went for a carriage ride in the public gardens.

ARABELLA. I won't be satisfied with his picture.

Every girl and woman in the state has one.

RUDOLPH. Autographed?

ARABELLA. What would that prove? Any idiot could sign the name of Johann Strauss. You could do it.

RUDOLPH (insulted). Indeed. (Severe.) You must leave at once.

ARABELLA (backing away from him). Oh! I didn't mean you were an idiot. (Contrite.)

Forgive me. Mrs. Peabody said you were the one who could help me.

RUDOLPH (recalling the name). Mrs. Peabody?

ARABELLA. Yes. You met her yesterday in the lobby. By the India rubber plant.

RUDOLPH (finger to his lips). Sssssh.

ARABELLA. I beg your pardon?

RUDOLPH (repeating). Sssssh. (RUDOLPH crosses R.) I'll close the door.

(RUDOLPH exits. There is the sound of a door closing, offstage. He returns, moves C.)

ARABELLA (excited). I thought you said the maestro wasn't here?

RUDOLPH. He isn't.

ARABELLA (pointing R). Then who's in there?

RUDOLPH. It's only the chambermaid. (Moves to chair DL, sits, crosses his leg.) What did Mrs. Peabody tell you?

ARABELLA. She told me who you were, of course. What you looked like.

RUDOLPH. Go on.

ARABELLA (cautiously). Then she told me what a few women know. What you do with scissors.

RUDOLPH. You make it sound scandalous. The truth of the matter is simple. In polite conversation with Mrs. Peabody I happened to mention that I trim the maestro's hair.

ARABELLA (enraptured). You sold her a curl from Johann Strauss' head.

RUDOLPH (rising, indignant). Is that what she told you? The ungrateful creature. (Paces.) That's what I get for trying to do a charitable act.

ARABELLA. You didn't sell her a lock?

RUDOLPH. She begged me, she pleaded with me, she threatened to throw herself under the wheels of the maestro's carriage. What else could I do? I gave her a lock. (Offended.) As for the money! Bah! She thrust it into my palm before I knew what was happening. I could hardly run into the street after her. It wouldn't have been in good taste.

ARABELLA. It would have caused gossip.

RUDOLPH. Especially in Boston. (ARABELLA sits in the chair DR. Taking out a handkerchief, she dabs at her eyes.)

ARABELLA. Oh, what am I to do? I did so count on a lock for my very own.

RUDOLPH (crossing C). Miss Parkhurst, if I gave a lock of the maestro's hair to every female who fancied one, Johann Strauss would be bald as a Turkish melon.

ARABELLA (into tears). Oh, oh, oh . . .

RUDOLPH (alarmed; looking nervously off R).

Please, you mustn't do that. Shhhhhh.

ARABELLA. I'll pay you twice what Mrs. Peabody gave you.