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Dramatic Publishing

A Comedy in Three Acts
by
WILLIAM DAVIDSON

Brother Goose



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(BROTHER GOOSE)

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BROTHER GOOSE

A Comedy in Three Acts

For Three Men and Nine Women

CHARACTERS

JEFF ADAMS "Brother Goose"
CAROL
WESLEY his flock
HYACINTH
MRS. LUMPKINS who vacates
PEGGY WINKEL who comes to
the rescue
MRS. MASON a neighbor
EVE a Southern charmer
ALICE an unwilling
football player
LENORE who has "plans"
MRS. TRIMMER of the Wee Blue Inns
TRUCK DRIVER who is plenty mad

PLACE: *The living room of the Adams home
in the Midwestern town of Ashton.*

TIME: *The present. Early fall.*

Television and radio have greatly shortened the life span of slang and colloquial phrases. In fact, some of these become archaic before the playbooks are off the press. You will find that current expressions are largely omitted from our text in the expectation the Director with the aid of his cast will provide the required "Slang of the Month."

ACT ONE

SCENE: The living room of the Adams home on one of the older streets in the Midwestern town of Ashton. The room is old-fashioned and in need of a little more thorough house cleaning. A door DR leads into the back part of the house, toward the kitchen. In the R wall, upstage, are French windows leading to a terrace. Between these two entrances, against the wall, is a TV set on a small table. On the wall above this table is a mirror. The rear of the stage is broken up by a stairway, URC, and a door to the outside, ULC. Directly UC, in the rear wall, is a large window. In front of the window is a table for a telephone, with a chair right of it. Downstage of the stairs, URC, is a desk, with a chair left of it. A roll of blueprints is on the desk. Left of the telephone stand is a hat tree. There is another window in the L wall at center. A baby grand piano (an upright will do just as well) is in the UL corner of the room. The keyboard faces slightly DL stage. Just right of the piano is an upholstered easy chair. There is a small sofa at RC, facing the audience. On it are several well-worn pillows. At DLC, also facing the audience, is an old-style sewing machine, with a straight chair back of it. On the floor right of the sewing machine is a basket overflowing with mending. The room presents complete disorder at the moment, with little evidence of the

so-called feminine touch. The curtains and drapes on the windows have not been changed in many months. Although the swimming season is over, and it is too early for skiing, a girl's bikini hangs on the hat tree, along with a sweater, and a pair of skis and several hockey sticks rest against the wall UC, near the window. On the piano is a vase of flowers, long since withered--and an electric toaster. A large, gaily-colored beach towel hangs over the bannister, while an umbrella has been hooked around the newel post. A man's coat is draped over the back of the easy chair by the piano. The pictures on the wall are in good taste, but one or two of them are slightly askew, the result of hasty dusting. The total effect is quite hectic.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: JEFF ADAMS, a personable young man of about twenty-five, is seated at the sewing machine, hemming a little girl's dress. He is in his shirt sleeves. Across from him, lying full-length on the sofa with her head toward L stage, is CAROL, a confident and self-possessed young lady of fifteen. She is frowning over a magazine. She has a pencil in one hand, and one leg is flung up over the back of the sofa. Beside her on the floor is a large box, labeled "Wheat Puffies." CAROL concentrates deeply as JEFF struggles with the sewing machine. After a few moments of jerky progress on the sewing machine, JEFF sticks himself with the needle.

JEFF (bringing his pricked finger to his mouth and exclaiming in exasperation.) Either I stick to architecture or they'll have to make these things with rubber needles.

CAROL (immersed in her own problems). Jeff, what is a word that rhymes with "right"? (She chews on the end of her pencil. JEFF holds up the dress for inspection. The hem looks like a profile of the Rocky Mountains.)

JEFF (looking at the dress). Out of sight! I hope it has a better figure after it's ironed.

CAROL (shaking her head). No--it's not poetic enough.

JEFF (pausing to glance at her). Carol, are you still trying to go to Europe with "Draino"?

CAROL (with disgust). That was a ghastly contest! (She continues eagerly.) But I'll get there with "Wheat Puffies," all right.

JEFF. You're one of my two favorite sisters, Carol, but I refuse to eat your way to victory through many more boxes of "Wheat Puffies." I'd rather drink "Draino."

CAROL. They're good for you. That's why they taste so awful. Now--listen. (She brings her feet to the floor and sits up, swinging her pencil in rhythm as she recites:)
"Wheat Puffies will make you feel right,
Wheat Puffies will keep your eyes bright.
Just try them and see
How their vitamins three
De dum, de de dum, de de dum."

JEFF (dryly). The last line is the only one that makes sense.

CAROL (in no mood for humor). Don't be an oaf! I just send one box top with the winning line to "Wheat Puffies" and I get a trip to Europe

and a Chrysler.

JEFF (sarcastically). What color?

CAROL (settling down full-length on the sofa again). I'm asking for the same color as Lenore Hudson's. (She pauses.) Lenore's sure hung up on you.

JEFF. You could see love in the Great Stone Face. (He looks critically at the dress.) I should have tried scallops.

CAROL. Gee, Lenore's lucky. I wish my uncle had made a fortune in bubble gum--and died.

On the door ULC bursts open and WESLEY ADAMS tumults into the room. He is wearing a dilapidated jacket over a soiled sport shirt, sneakers, and a pair of dirty slacks. WES is about seventeen.)

WES (pausing for a moment UC to tear off his jacket and toss it in the general direction of the telephone stand, before rushing up the stairs). Boy, oh, boy, you should see that chick Mason! Is she an ultimate! Has anybody seen my new pants? (WES starts up the stairs.)

JEFF. Look on the floor. They may be under your jacket. (He indicates the skis against the wall UC.) Take those skis up with you.

WES (pausing at the steps). Ah, it's already October. I'll be using them again in a couple of months. Don't forget I've got that instructor's job at Skimore this winter. (WES goes out URC, three steps at a time, pulling off his shirt as he goes. As the scene continues, JEFF continues with jerky progress on the

sewing machine.)

JEFF (to CAROL). Now, who is the girl?

CAROL. It's Eve Mason. They moved in this morning. I watched her from my bedroom window for hours while she unpacked. There isn't even room for a burglar in her closet.

JEFF. I understand the Masons are from the South.

CAROL. Sure. They're from Richmond--or Tulsa --or some place like that.

(WES comes racing down the stairs again. He is getting into a clean shirt on the way with his shirttails flying behind.)

WES (coming to C). Boy, have I got the jump on Muggs Scofield for this chick. (He looks around wildly.) I can't find my pants.

JEFF (indicating the basket on the floor R of the sewing machine). Try the mending basket. Architecture has slowed up production. (WES dives wildly through the mending basket scattering the contents in every direction.)

CAROL (who has been craning her neck to see). Which ones do you want?

WES. The blue ones. That's all I got.

CAROL. Aren't those the ones Hy's been wearing turned up for football practice?

WES (tragically). Football practice! They're ruined. Who let her have 'em?

JEFF. She probably found them on the floor. (He indicates Wes' coat.)

WES (this is urgent). Jeff, you gotta do something about Hy. I can't have a swell girl like Eve Mason calling, with me in

these old relics. I ought to have a car, too!

CAROL. You mean Eve Mason's coming for you?

JEFF. When did you meet her?

WES. That's just it. I haven't met her yet. That's why I gotta have my new pants.

CAROL. Peel 'em off Hy, you dope.

WES. Where is she?

CAROL. She's wiping dishes tonight.

WES (in pain). With my pants! (He starts for the kitchen.)

CAROL. No--in 'em. She's helping Mrs. Lumpkins --stupid.

WES (pausing right of the sofa). Hy is! I thought I traded with you.

CAROL. You did, but I traded with her. I have to finish my limerick tonight.

(MRS. LUMPKINS, a middle-aged, expressionless, washed-out woman with a mournful voice, enters DR.)

MRS. LUMPKINS (pausing by the door). Was one of you two goin' to wash the dishes?

WES (hastily backing behind the sofa and over to C stage). Not me! I traded with Carol.

CAROL. And I traded with Hy.

MRS. LUMPKINS (moving to right of sofa). Then I guess she done traded back, because she said she was leavin' for football practice.

JEFF. Not this late, Mrs. Lumpkins. It's almost dark.

MRS. LUMPKINS. The time of day ain't got nothin' to do with nothin' that happens in this house, Mr. Adams.

WES (realizing that this is a turn for the worse). Hy! Oh, Hy!

CAROL (taking up the cry as she sits up). Hyacinth!

WES (in a guileful voice, crossing to the foot of the steps URC and calling upstairs.) Do you want some candy? (This is evidently an old one, for there is no answer. Suddenly, however, a stealthy sound can be heard emanating from the basement, followed by the rattle of shifting boxes. There is a moment's silence as all listen intently, glancing down at the floor at C stage and then over toward L stage.)

CAROL (jumping up). She's in the storeroom.

WES. She's climbing on those boxes.

CAROL (moving toward WES). She's sneaking out the basement window.

WES (bolting to the door ULC). I'll catch her as she comes out.

CAROL (rushing to the door DR, banging into MRS. LUMPKINS roughly as she passes her). I'll watch the cellar door.

JEFF (calling after them). And take it easy. Remember she's just a kid. (WES goes out ULC, and CAROL goes out DR.)

MRS. LUMPKINS (indignant at being bumped). Tonight I'm leavin', Mr. Adams. (She comes to C stage belligerently, her hands on her hips.) I'd rather pay full rent for my room than cook suppers for this zoo.

JEFF (protesting). But you can't leave like this, Mrs. Lumpkins--you have to give me thirty days' notice.

MRS. LUMPKINS. On the room I do, but on the job I don't. So should I quit the job now and stay in the room for a month?

JEFF. At least give me time enough to get someone else!

MRS. LUMPKINS. It won't do no good, Mr. Adams. They won't stay, neither. It's the kind of

job you got to be married to.

JEFF (crossing to her). You must remember these kids have lost their parents. You can't expect an older brother to keep things running smoothly all the time. Of course, right now, while I'm trying to get my architecture practice worked up, things are a little worse than usual.

MRS. LUMPKINS. For you. . . (She purses her lips and nods her head.) . . . those are good reasons for you. For me--no.

JEFF (persuasively). This is a pretty cheap way to pay for a nice room.

MRS. LUMPKINS. I wouldn't stay in this house another day if you give me a suite at the Hilton! (MRS. LUMPKINS goes out D R. JEFF, discouraged, crosses to the sewing machine and sits.)

(There is a sound of scuffling off ULC. JEFF looks up as CAROL enters DR and moves to the sofa, looking U L C. There are cries from U L C and WES, with HYACINTH in tow, enters U L C. HYACINTH, who is about ten, looks as if she had been dragged through the coal bin. Her hands and face are smudged with dust. She is wearing a football helmet, several sizes too big for her, and a brilliant jersey with a large numeral on the back. She has on Wes's new pants which are also several sizes too big and turned up. The tail of her shirt is hanging out over the pants, and she is carrying a football. Her expression is most belligerent.)

HY (as she struggles to get free). Leave me alone!

WES. Here she is. (He drags the struggling HY to C stage.) And she's got on my new pants-- and look at 'em.

JEFF. Why, Hyacinth! Give those right back to Wes.

CAROL. She looks positively gruesome. (She sprawls out on the sofa again.)

HY. I soil easy. (She yanks away from Wes's grasp.)

JEFF. Where were you going?

HY (in utter surprise). Who, me?

JEFF. Yes--you!

HY. Why--why--I was going to wash dishes, I betcha.

WES. Oh, yeah!

JEFF. In the storeroom? (CAROL snorts.)

HY. I--I was just gettin' ready.

WES. Ready for what?

HY. For washin'. A kid doesn't want to get all mixed up with soapy water for nothin'.

CAROL. You won't. There's practically a barrel of dishes.

HY (moving down to JEFF). Mrs. Lumpkins is a pretty expensive cook. She costs us a lot of money--in soap.

JEFF. We won't have to worry about that much longer. (He points DR.) You get right out and start on those dishes.

HY (edging toward the door ULC). Sure--in just a sec!

WES (grabbing her arm as he sees that she is trying to escape). Not so fast there!

HY (trying to jerk loose). Hey, leggo!

WES (struggling with her). The kitchen isn't that way.

HY. I'll be right back--honest. You'll be surprised how right back I am. (She manages to jerk free of WES.)

JEFF. You'll have to finish up the dishes first, Hy.

HY (crossing to JEFF again). But the Tigers have just gotta have the ball--so we can practice some new plays.

CAROL (glancing out the French windows). There's nobody on your field and, besides, it's darker than pitch.

WES. You couldn't even see a pushball out there.

HY. We're going to practice under the Chevrolet sign.

JEFF. What?

HY. Between blinks.

JEFF. I'm sorry, Hy. But tonight they will have to practice without you.

HY (earnestly). But I gotta be there tonight, Jeff--honest. If I'm not there, they'll elect Stuffy Siegel captain--even if he hasn't got a football.

WES. Why shouldn't they? He's your best player, isn't he?

HY. He's just next to best.

JEFF (smiling in spite of himself). Who is your choice for captain, Hy?

HY (totally matter-of-fact). Me.

WES. Ah--they'll want a boy for captain.

HY. Sure--that's why I gotta be there.

JEFF. I'm afraid you'll have to let the majority decide, Hy.

HY (eagerly, moving up to the door ULC). Sure--but first I gotta get the majority--(She pauses by the door, and pantomimes spitting on her hands, and then rubbing them together.)--one Tiger at a time, I betcha.

JEFF (sternly). I'm sorry, but you can't go out again tonight. You've tried to skip out on the dishes, you haven't done your practicing, and you've taken Wes's pants.

HY (one final appeal). But I just gotta, Jeff. You

don't understand why I just gotta.

JEFF (pointing a commanding finger DR). You march right out to that kitchen. (HY, almost on the verge of tears, turns from the door ULC and slams the football on top of the piano.)

WES. And give me those pants. (He moves behind the sofa.)

HY (slowly and with dead seriousness). You are making a very dreadful mistake, Jeff, and if we lose to the "Dawn Mortuary Hellcats" tomorrow there isn't a "Palace of Sweets Saber-Tooth Tiger" that'll speak to you again as long as he lives. (HY walks slowly and with considerable dignity to the door DR and exits.)

JEFF (looking after her a moment, troubled). I'm afraid I made a mistake in not letting her go.

CAROL. You shouldn't let her play football at all. She's getting to be a ghastly tomboy. (She settles comfortably on the sofa and continues her work.)

JEFF. There are worse things than tomboys, Carol.

(HY, in shorts, suddenly opens the door DR.)

CAROL. Hy, those are my shorts.

HY. I gotta wear something. They were on the floor. (HY throws the pants at WES. They hit him squarely in the face.) Here's your old pants. (She turns to JEFF.) And if we don't beat the "Mortuaries" tomorrow, I can't buy you a birthday present--and--(She chokes with a sob.)--I'm glad! (HY goes out DR. WES, C stage, picks up his pants.)

WES. And I ought to have a car, too. (He is suddenly

galvanized into action.) I guess I'd better be calling Eve now. (He dashes UC to the telephone.)

JEFF. You're sure you aren't making a fool of yourself?

WES (seated, dialing information). I know what I'm doing, all right. . . . (He speaks into the telephone.) The Stanley Masons, at five forty-six Court Street, please. . . . Thanks. (He presses down the hook, and, after releasing it, proceeds to dial a number.)

CAROL. She has beautiful clothes, too. The kind that wear out. (She sighs.)

WES. Boy, oh, boy, is this going to put me one up on Muggs! (He speaks into the telephone.) Hello. . . . (He covers the mouthpiece.) It's Eve! Has she got a honey of a Southern accent! (He again speaks into the telephone, trying to disguise his voice and speaking rather pompously.) I am very sorry to trouble you--very sorry, indeed, but I am trying to get in touch with Wesley Adams. . . . Yes, I know, but his telephone is out of order, and it occurred to me that living right next door, you might be willing to call him to your telephone. . . . That is very kind of you, indeed. . . . Why--eh--just say it's his friend, Punky Page of the Purple Parrots. . . . Yes, that's it. (He hangs up with a flourish, rises, and struts to C.) How's that for using the old cerebellum?

JEFF (dryly). If it's just the same with you, I'll reserve judgment.

CAROL (with some disgust). You mean she's coming right over here and call you to her phone--

to talk to Punky Page?

WES (glancing at his wrist watch). In exactly five minutes the flower of the Southland will be knocking on the door to ask Wesley Adams if he will be kind enough to pay her a call. (He gives a sudden cry.) My gosh--my pants! (WES makes a mad dash to pick up his pants and then sits in the easy chair right of the piano. His back is to the door ULC.)

CAROL (on the spoken cue, ". . . my pants"). When you get there, there won't be anybody on the phone.

WES. I'll say there won't. Not even Punky Page. We'll just sit around a few minutes, waiting for the guy to call back. Then, sort of offhand, I'll say, "Eve, I'm afraid Punky had to go. (He starts to feel in his pocket.) Suppose we give the movies a whirl." (He brings his hand out suddenly.) Jeff, have you got a couple of dollars? (He rises and comes to Jeff.)

JEFF (definitely). No.

WES. Ah, come on. I got enough for the tax.

JEFF (rising with the dress, crossing UC and hanging it on the hat tree). Nothing doing. There are only a few dollars between you kids and moving in with Aunt Virginia, but if I can just land the job of designing Mrs. Trimmer's new dance hall, we'll all go to the movies. (He turns and comes down to C on the end of his line.)

WES (holding up his hand). Forget I mentioned it. (He crosses to JEFF with the pants.) Can't you get these things down to earth?

JEFF. Let's see. (He takes the pants from WES. He sits by the sewing machine again.)

Wow! She's basted them with the sewing machine. Not too well, fortunately. (WES remains standing right of JEFF. JEFF inspects the pants dubiously for a moment and then takes out his knife and starts to rip a hem. The doorbell rings off ULC.)

WES. Gee, she's ahead of time! Carol, you answer it. (He looks dubiously at his pants and rushes off URC, bolts upstairs and returns almost immediately with an old guitar. With another mad dash he seats himself in the easy chair right of the piano. The doorbell, meanwhile, has rung again, and CAROL manages to drag herself from the sofa and up to UC stage, where she looks on in disgust at Wes's actions. As she is about to open the door.) Hey, wait a sec! (He pulls out a pocket comb, makes a few futile passes to comb his unruly hair, and assumes what he considers an air of intense preoccupation as he plucks a few notes on the guitar--badly.)

CAROL (UC, in disgust). Is God's gift to Eve ready to unveil himself?

WES. Shut up! Okay! (CAROL opens the door ULC to speak to a cheerful gentleman, unseen, offstage.)

VOICE (off ULC). Mr. Adams in?

CAROL. Sure. Jeff! There's a guy here that's got something for you. (WES heaves a sigh of relief.)

JEFF. Oh, fine! (He hurries to the door.) I'm Mr. Adams. Are you from Mrs. Trimmer?

VOICE (off ULC). No--from the sheriff's office. (He hands JEFF a paper.) Tax sales notice.

JEFF (taking it, his enthusiasm dampened). Oh, yes. . . . Yes, of course.