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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# Hopes and Words and Ordinary Things

by  
RONALD BURKE



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(HOPES AND WORDS AND ORDINARY THINGS)

ISBN 0-87129-816-3

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**HOPES AND WORDS AND ORDINARY THINGS**  
*A Play in One Act*  
**For Four Men and Four Women**

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**CHARACTERS**

**ALISON DRAKE**

**HARRIET TODD**

**EMILY TODD**

**MR. O'FLARHETY**

**ROGER BROWN**

**ERIC BENTLY**

**MRS. POTTER**

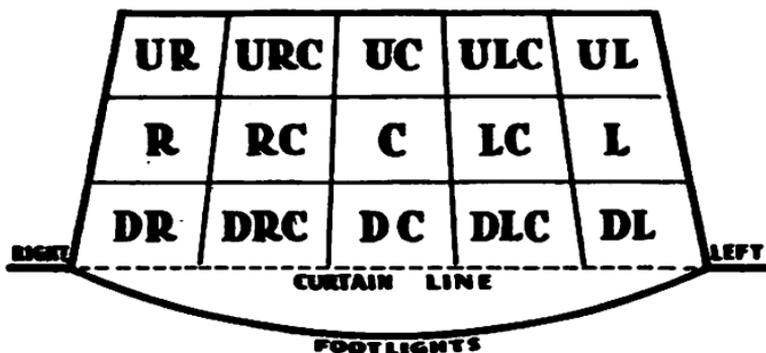
**McGINTY**

**TIME:**       *Late spring, early 1900's.*

**PLACE:**      *A small town park.*

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## 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.

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**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.

## *Scene 1.*

**SCENE:** A small town park, late spring in the early 1900's. A park bench is DL, facing L, and a fountain statue with a sitting place is slightly UR. Another bench is UC, facing the fountain.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** The music to "While Strolling Through The Park One Day" is heard and ALISON DRAKE, in her late twenties, is seen seated at the DL bench with a palette of oil paints and canvas painting a scene she sees off L. A couple or two wander through the park, and a park policeman acknowledges Alison's work and strolls on about his business. A small girl /HARRIET TODD/ about eight to twelve years old enters from UR and sneaks up behind ALISON. The music ends abruptly as she shouts close behind ALISON.)

**HARRIET.** Boo! (ALISON, startled, jumps and smears her painting.)

**ALISON.** Oh! (HARRIET laughs and runs off UR.) Harriet Todd! I'll skin you! (She collects herself and turns attention to the canvas.) My goodness -- that girl! Look what she made me do! (She sits and prepares to repair the damage.)

(EMILY TODD enters from UR, notices ALISON, hesitates, then comes on in.)

EMILY. There you are, Alison. I thought I might find you here. I went by your house, but you'd already left. (ALISON, working at the smeared painting, looks up at EMILY's approach and then back to the canvas.)

ALISON. I came rather early this morning. (Pause.) That wild little sister of yours just gave me a start and I'm afraid I smudged my painting.

EMILY. Harriet? Is she here?

ALISON. There's no telling where she is now. Honestly, Emily, that girl should have been a boy.

EMILY. I know. But just be glad you don't have to live with her. (Pause.) You had promised to give me a lesson today, Alison.

ALISON. Oh, that's right -- so I did. I'm sorry, Emily. It completely slipped my mind.

EMILY. Well, that's all right. I brought my knitting, anyway.

ALISON. Knitting? I didn't know you could knit.

EMILY (taking out knitting). I can't really -- about like I paint, I guess -- but I try. (Noticing painting.) How come you're painting that old place?

ALISON. Why, it's a charming old house. It's -- it's . . . a mansion. I particularly like this view of it from the park -- through the new leaves of the trees.

EMILY. Humph! It's an old barn!

ALISON. Oh, in a way, I suppose. But it's still full of charm. I've wanted to do a painting of it for quite some time. (Pause.) I decided that now, before I go to New York, I'd better get it done.

EMILY. Alison, you're not serious about this New York business, are you?

ALISON. Of course I am. The art world doesn't come to Maple Springs, Missouri, you know. One has

to go to it.

EMILY. True -- if you care about what the rest of the world thinks.

ALISON. Don't you?

EMILY. No. All I care about is Roger. And when we're married, I don't care what the rest of the world does.

ALISON (surprised). Why, Emily!

EMILY. Yes, that's right.

ALISON (laughing it off lightly). I didn't know you were getting married.

EMILY. Sure we are.

ALISON. But when, Emily?

EMILY. Oh, any day now.

ALISON. Really?

EMILY. As soon as I can trap him into proposing. I may have to ask him myself. (ALISON laughs lightly.) Roger's the shy type.

ALISON. Roger? Shy?

EMILY. Yes -- he shies away from me. (Pause.) He was supposed to have met me in the park at two, and he still isn't here. (She gets up, a little perturbed, and goes C to see if she can see Roger coming.) You have to be firm with Roger or he forgets you exist.

(OFFICER O'FLARHETY begins entering from DR.)

ALISON. Patience, Emily, is a woman's chief virtue.

EMILY (seeing MR. O'FLARHETY). Oh, good afternoon, Mr. O'Flarhety.

MR. O'FLARHETY (Irish accent). Good day to ya, Miss Emily. And isn't it a grand afternoon for a stroll in the park? (ALISON smiles at him in recognition.)

EMILY. I suppose so -- if you have anyone to stroll with.

ALISON. Emily is expecting Roger Brown,  
Mr. O'Flarhety.

MR. O'FLARHETY. Ah! I saw 'im just a short  
time ago -- at Mr. Carson's drug store, I  
believe it was.

EMILY. So that's where he is! He was supposed  
to meet me here at two. Just wait'll I see him!

MR. O'FLARHETY. Aye -- don't be too harsh  
with the lad, Miss Emily. He's a good-hearted  
boy. (Then noticing Alison's painting.) And  
that's a fine painting you're gonna have there,  
Miss Alison. The old Crutcher place is a  
magnificent old house.

EMILY (to herself). It's a barn!

ALISON. Thank you, Mr. O'Flarhety. I've always  
admired the house.

EMILY. It's her farewell gift to Maple Springs  
before she leaves for New York, Mr. O'Flarhety.

MR. O'FLARHETY. New York? Indeed, now!  
Surely you're not leavin' us?

ALISON. Oh, not permanently, of course. But for  
two or three years, I guess -- until I can be-  
come established as an artist. This is my  
home -- and I couldn't just leave it. But there  
aren't any opportunities in Maple Springs for  
artists, Mr. O'Flarhety . . . and I'm not  
getting any younger, you know.

MR. O'FLARHETY. Well, now, I . . .

EMILY. If you'd settle down and get married, you  
wouldn't have to worry about becoming famous  
or something.

ALISON. Married? For goodness sake, Emily!

MR. O'FLARHETY. Well, now, there's nothin'  
wrong with that. Mrs. O'Flarhety has given  
me some fine years.

ALISON. Why, Emily, where did you get such an  
idea? Who would I marry?

MR. O'FLARHETY. Ah, there's not a young man in town that wouldn't be proud to have you, Miss Alison.

ALISON (embarrassed). Thank you, Mr. O'Flarhety, but, really, I . . .

EMILY. It's not just any man, Mr. O'Flarhety. She's holding out for Eric Bently.

ALISON. Emily!

MR. O'FLARHETY. Well, he's a fine young man, that one.

ALISON. Of course he is! But Mr. Bently is not interested in me. He has an important career. Eric is a very promising young lawyer. Anyway, he's strictly the bachelor type.

EMILY. What she means is, he won't ask her. Just like Roger and me. (Sighs.)

ALISON. I mean no such thing, Emily!

EMILY. Well, if he'd ask you, you'd jump at the chance.

ALISON (flustered). Well, I . . . why . . . why . . . how can you say that? Of course I wouldn't. That is, he's not ready for marriage, and . . .

EMILY. Oh, he's not, is he? That's not what Roger tells me. Roger is a very good friend of Mr. Eric Bently's and he tells me that Eric Bently would be very much interested in you -- if you'd get down off your high horse a little so he could talk to you instead of always blowing around about going off somewhere to be somebody famous. Missouri was good enough for Mark Twain. Why isn't it good enough for you?

ALISON. Emily! Really!

EMILY. Well, that's right. And if you want to know what I think . . .

ALISON. Well, I don't!

EMILY. I think you ought to come right out and ask him to marry you!

ALISON. Ask him? Emily, I believe you have said enough.

MR. O'FLARHETY (embarrassed). Well, I guess I'd best be easin' along. Good day to ya, ladies . . . and I'm hopin' you'll be havin' some second thoughts about runnin' off to New York, Miss Alison. New York's awfully crowded in the summer . . . and we really would be missin' ya in these parts.

ALISON. Thank you, Mr. O'Flarhety . . . and good day. (MR. O'FLARHETY exits DL.)

EMILY (calling after him). If you see that kid sister of mine lurking around, Mr. O'Flarhety, shoo her on home, or Pa'll tan her hide!

ALISON. Emily, my goodness. You shouldn't say things like that in front of Mr. O'Flarhety!

EMILY. Why not? It's true, isn't it? If Eric would say the word, you would forget about New York so fast . . .

ALISON. Eric and I have a great deal of respect for one another and that's all there is to it. Now I must be getting home. (Collecting her painting materials, then saying to herself.) My "high horse," huh? Well, there's more than one high horse in this town.

EMILY. Oh, you sophisticated types just kill me! You know all the answers, but you can't even talk to one another. A lotta good your brains are!

ALISON. And how about you and Roger? I don't see him tearing your door down!

EMILY. He will! He will!

ALISON (exiting; coldly). Good day, Emily.

(ROGER enters from UR.)

ROGER. Emily, Emily -- there you are. Emily, I've been looking all over for you. Where have you been?

EMILY. Oh, is that so? Well, it so happens that I've been right here since two o'clock waiting for you!

ROGER. Two o'clock? But, Emily, I was here at one. I told you one o'clock.

EMILY. Is that so? Now you listen here, Mr. Roger Brown -- it so happens that Alison Drake has been sitting right here since early this morning and you were not here at one o'clock! Now, where have you been?

ROGER (defeated). Oh, well, I got detained, Emily.

EMILY. Down at the drug store?

ROGER (surprised). How'd you know?

EMILY. I read you like a book, Roger, like a book.

ROGER. But I . . . I . . . aw, nuts, Emily. I was just killin' a little time with the fellas. I'm sorry, Emily.

EMILY (taking advantage of the situation; coyly now). You don't love me, Roger.

ROGER (hurt). Aw, sure I do, Emily.

EMILY. No, you don't.

ROGER. Yes, I do!

EMILY (after a pause). Really?

ROGER. Sure.

EMILY (bait in the trap). How much?

ROGER. Oh, just a whole lot.

EMILY (pressing). How much is that, Roger?

ROGER. Gee, Emily -- just as much as there is, I guess.

EMILY (ready for the kill). Enough to do something for me?

ROGER (confident that the situation has now eased).  
Sure, Emily. (Soft soap.) You know I'd do  
anything for you.

EMILY (now very business-like). Well, then --  
I want you to talk to Eric Bently, Roger.

ROGER. Eric? Sure, I talk to him all the time.

EMILY. I want you to tell Eric to talk Alison out  
of going to New York.

ROGER. New York?

EMILY. Yes. She thinks she's going to become  
famous or something.

ROGER. What's wrong with that?

EMILY. Nothing -- except for going to New York  
to do it.

ROGER. I don't get it. If she wants to go to  
New York, so let her go to New York. I mean,  
she's a big girl, Emily.

EMILY. But she's my friend.

ROGER. And Eric's my friend.

EMILY (triumphantly). Exactly. We shouldn't be  
responsible for keeping our best friends apart!

ROGER (baffled by this female logic). Sheesh!

EMILY (laying out the plans). Now, if you talk Eric  
into talking Alison out of going to New York . . .

ROGER (interrupting). How do you know he even  
cares if she goes to New York or not?

EMILY. You told me he did!

ROGER (defeated). Oh . . .

EMILY. You said he could really care for her if  
she'd get down off her intellectual high horse,  
and . . .

ROGER (interrupting). Yes -- if! What makes you  
think she's gonna get off it?

EMILY (victoriously). Because I knocked her off  
it -- this afternoon -- and right in front of  
Mr. O'Flarhety.

ROGER. You hadn't ought to be so meddling, Emily.

(Changing subject, goes to fountain.) Have you made your wish today?

EMILY (haughtily; sarcastically). No, I've been too busy -- meddling.

ROGER. Well, come on -- make your wish. (Takes nickel from his pocket and hands it to her; she tosses it in fountain and wishes.) What'd you wish?

EMILY. You wish, too.

ROGER. For Pete's sake, Emily. . . .

EMILY. Roger. . . .

ROGER (giving in). Oh, all right. . . . (Tosses another nickel in.) There, old stone face -- do your stuff.

EMILY. What did you wish for, Roger? (Not having seriously wished, ROGER is stumped.)

ROGER. Ah. . . you wished first, Emily. You tell me!

EMILY (pointedly). I wished you'd talk to Eric. (ROGER is exasperated.) Now, what'd you wish?

ROGER (defiantly, to get the last word). I wished Alison wouldn't go to New York. There, now, the whole thing is settled, and. . . .

EMILY (hurt). You don't love me.

ROGER. Aw, sure I do.

EMILY. No, you don't.

ROGER (coming closer). Yes, I do, Emily. (He puts his arms around her, she responds.)

EMILY (after a pause). Really?

ROGER (feeling in control of things again). You know I do. I'm crazy about you.

EMILY (exploding). Then do what I tell you. Look! There's Eric now -- call him over and tell him. Call him over.

ROGER. But, Emily. . . .

EMILY (insistently). Call him over, Roger.

ROGER. Oh, all right. (Calls.) Eric! Oh, Eric.  
(Then quickly and uncertainly to EMILY.) But  
what'll I say?

EMILY. Just say what I told you. Now, call him.

ROGER (defeated). Eric. Can you . . . can you  
come here a minute?

EMILY. That's the way.

(EMILY pretends disinterest as ERIC enters  
from DR.)

ERIC. Hello, Roger . . . Emily.

EMILY. I was just leaving.

ERIC. Don't leave on my account.

ROGER. I'll see you later, Emily. (EMILY steps  
back but doesn't leave.) Have you got a  
minute, Eric? I sorta heard something I  
thought you might . . . well . . . be  
interested in. (Glances back and sees that  
EMILY is still there.) Good-bye, Emily.

EMILY. I was just leaving.

ROGER (sarcastically). Really? (Offended,  
EMILY turns and marches toward UR to exit,  
stays and listens.)

ERIC. What's on your mind, Roger?

ROGER. Mind? Oh . . . ah . . . nothing. I guess.  
Beautiful day!

ERIC. Yes, it certainly is. I was trying to do  
some work this morning, but couldn't seem to  
settle down. I guess I work better on gloomy  
days.

ROGER (still uneasy because EMILY is there). Yes,  
sir! It's certainly a beautiful day.

EMILY (stage whisper). Tell him, Roger.

ROGER (exasperated). Emily . . . for Pete's sake  
. . . I'll see you later. (EMILY goes on out  
UR.)

ERIC. What's wrong with Emily?

ROGER. Emily? Oh, nothing. She's just . . .  
well, you know . . . Emily. (Shrugs.)

Beautiful day, Eric. (ERIC, amusedly puzzled  
at the rather obvious stalling, decides to change  
the subject in order to draw ROGER out.)

ERIC. Well, I guess I'll be getting on along. I've  
got to . . .

ROGER. Oh, no! I mean . . . ah . . . I thought  
I might tell you something.

ERIC. What is it?

ROGER (checking to make sure Emily is gone).

Eric . . . ah . . . Alison's a pretty good  
painter, don't you think?

ERIC. Alison Drake? Why, yes . . . I suppose so.  
She does nice work.

ROGER. How do you think she'd go over in New  
York?

ERIC. New York? Well . . . (A little smile;  
shakes head non-committally.) I don't know --  
it's pretty crowded in New York -- competitive,  
I mean. You have to be pretty good.

ROGER. Yeah, that's what I say.

ERIC. But I don't believe she'd actually go to New  
York. I . . .

ROGER (interrupting). Now, just let me tell you  
something . . . (Becomes authoritative with  
his new knowledge.) . . . she's going!

ERIC (slowly, surprised). You don't mean it?

ROGER (positively). I mean it. Just flat goin' to  
New York -- all alone.

ERIC (suspiciously). Where'd you hear this?

ROGER. Well, I hear things, you know -- but it's  
the straight dope.

ERIC (putting two and two together). Emily?  
(ROGER is disappointed that ERIC could see  
through him.)