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Dramatic Publishing

BLINDSPOT

A One-Act Play

By

NANCY PAHL GILSENAN



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(BLINDSPOT)

BLINDSPOT
A Play In One Act
For Three Men and Three Women

C H A R A C T E R S

- MAGDA ALSTED**. an old woman of seventy-four
- HERDIS ALSTED**. her seventy-two-year-old sister
- LESLIE ALSTED** their great niece
- LOU PEARSON** neighbor of the Alsted sisters
- DR. MEYER** a professor of social work
- RICK** a twelve-year-old “retarded” boy

TIME: February, about 1976

PLACE: The Minneapolis home of the Alsted sisters

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is set in the south Minneapolis home of the Alsted sisters. It is February, about 1976. All four scenes take place in the living room.

The living room has two entrances, to the outside stage right and to the kitchen and bedroom stage left. There is also a window to the outside stage right. Two stuffed chairs, one with a bad spring, and a couch are arranged upstage center. There is a coffee table near the chairs. A large (4' by 4') gas furnace with a window to see the flame is downstage center. There are various bookshelves, filled to overflowing. Stacks of news magazines lie scattered about. In one corner, six old televisions are piled. The room and the furniture are obviously deteriorating: peeling wallpaper, ripped upholstery, a broken lamp.

NOTES ON CHARACTERS

MAGDA ALSTED. An old woman of seventy-four with wild white hair, a crooked nose, a wart on her chin, and a warm, broad smile. She dresses carelessly in an old black dress, and hobbles about on a cane. She is quick-witted, thoughtful, young in spirit, obviously bright, and self-educated.

HERDIS ALSTED. Magda's seventy-two-year-old sister. She moves carefully, wearing a brown, two-piece suit which is as old as Magda's dress, but in much better condition. Herdis has dyed hair and wears make-up. She is more serious than Magda, and pays more attention to etiquette. But she, too, is intelligent, well-read, and has a healthy sense of humor.

LESLIE ALSTED. The Alsted sisters' great niece. At twenty-two, she is a graduate student in social work at the nearby University of Minnesota. She is self-centered, dogmatic and naive. Although she takes advantage of her aunts on a regular basis, she is not really conscious of it and has a genuine affection for the two old women.

LOU PEARSON. A retired Naval petty officer and neighbor to the Alsted sisters. He dresses in a heavy black overcoat, boots, Russian-style fur hat, scarf, plaid flannel shirt, suspenders and dark trousers. He's an opinionated pessimist who distains the world, but doesn't mind Herdis and Magda.

DR. MEYER. A professor of social work at the University. He is about fifty, dresses in neat, conservative clothes and has a patient but matter-of-fact personality.

RICK. A boy of twelve, blind and institutionalized since infancy. He is thin, pale and unkempt. He wears an oversized white shirt, black pants, white socks and black shoes. Both his cap and coat are worn and ill-fitting. His eyes are scarred, producing a dark, hollow appearance around the sockets. His fingers and hands are bent, almost arthritic, which makes holding objects difficult. He walks with his hands held forward, swaying slightly from side to side.

SCENE ONE

SCENE: The living room of the Alsted sisters.

AS LIGHTS COME UP: HERDIS is seated on the couch, playing an autoharp. She is half-singing, half-humming, a simple folksong melody. There is an enormous clamor off in the kitchen, where MAGDA is putting on her winter clothes to go outside.

HERDIS. What are you doing, Magda?

MAGDA (off). Getting ready to go outside.

HERDIS. But it's ten below. Why don't you wait until this afternoon? Once the sun's been out for a while it should get up to three or four.

(MAGDA enters, loaded with scarf, heavy coat, boots, hat and gloves.)

MAGDA. I don't want to put this off, Herdis. I'm at the age where I could be dead by this afternoon. I'll take my chances now. Hand me the shovel, will you?

HERDIS (rising, fetching the shovel DR). I really think this can wait. It's only February, Magda — why not wait to shovel 'til April?

MAGDA. Leslie's coming this morning. She said she's bringing us the magazines and she's also bringing someone to meet us. Could be a boy friend from the University. They'll need a chairlift to make it up that drift over the

walk.

HERDIS. Maybe we should call and tell her not to come.

MAGDA. It sounded urgent. Besides, I have to clear it for the mailman. He left us a note yesterday. (She draws the note out of her coat pocket.) He refuses to make any more deliveries where “the means of egress is blocked by flowing water, fallen timber, molten lava or excessive glacial material.” He underlined glacial material. Our social security is due today, so we better get the walk cleared. (HERDIS puts the autoharp away. She now looks worried.)

HERDIS. We don’t have much to serve Leslie and her friend. We’re running low on coffee.

MAGDA. Well, offer them both a cup. I’ll say I can’t have any because I’m in training. We’ll get some groceries as soon as our checks come. (She goes to the door.)

HERDIS. Be careful, Magda. Leslie doesn’t like it when you shovel. (Almost yelling at MAGDA as she goes out the door.) Leslie says your an old fool to shovel.

MAGDA (exiting). If my engine fails, you may sell my body for spare parts. (She is gone. HERDIS goes to the window to watch. She goes through a series of worried gestures.)

HERDIS. Be careful, dear. (Terrified.) Magda. Magda! Watch out! (She runs to the door.) Oh, dear. Thank goodness you’re all right. Don’t try to get up. Wait a minute. I see Leslie getting off the bus. Don’t move until she gets here. (HERDIS moves a chair over to the door so that MAGDA will land in it when LESLIE brings her in.)

(HERDIS goes back to open the door and LESLIE drags MAGDA in by holding her under the arms with her back resting on Leslie’s chest. LESLIE has a briefcase tucked under her arm.)

MAGDA. Take it easy, Leslie. It's not the shoot-out at the OK Corral, you know.

LESLIE (maneuvering MAGDA into the chair). You silly old woman. I've told you not to shovel that walk. Why don't you hire someone to do it?

MAGDA. We're saving our money for a Porsche, dear. Did you bring the magazines? (LESLIE takes a stack of magazines out of the briefcase. She hands them to HERDIS.)

HERDIS (dividing the magazines between MAGDA and herself). Aren't you sweet, Leslie? I hope the other students at the dorm don't mind if you give them to us.

LESLIE. They don't even notice. I never take them off the lounge shelf until they're two weeks old.

HERDIS. You take the *Newsweek*, Magda. I'll read *Time* first. I can't wait to see how the Europeans react to the President's upcoming visit.

LESLIE. But he's been back for three days, Aunt Herdis.

MAGDA. Ah, ah, now, Leslie. Don't spoil it. Herdis and I don't know he's left yet.

LESLIE. But you must have seen it on T.V.

HERDIS. The last one died over the new year, during half-time at the Rose Bowl.

LESLIE. Why on earth didn't you have it fixed?

MAGDA (paging through a magazine). It's all going for the Porsche, dear.

HERDIS. Didn't you say you were bringing someone with you? Someone from school?

LESLIE. Not exactly from school. Did I tell you about my social work class with Dr. Meyer?

HERDIS. You'll make a wonderful social worker, Leslie.

LESLIE. What makes you think so, Aunt Herdis?

HERDIS. Because you always feel so sorry for everyone.

MAGDA. Isn't that the class where you'll be assigned to work with a patient from the State Hospital?

LESLIE (hesitantly). That's right. (Rushing on.) Dr. Meyer

is chairman of the department. He's a great lecturer, absolutely dynamic. Nobody makes poverty sound like he does, you know what I mean?

MAGDA. No, but we'll mull it over for a while, dear.

HERDIS. What about your friend, Leslie?

LESLIE. Oh, he's outside. (HERDIS and MAGDA stop their reading and stare at LESLIE in disbelief.)

HERDIS (rising). Standing out in the cold? (She moves toward the door.) I didn't see him.

LESLIE. Aunt Herdis, wait a minute. Please. He'll be all right. I want to tell you about him first.

MAGDA. A boy friend, Leslie?

HERDIS. Isn't that nice? Say no more. (She takes hold of the door handle.)

LESLIE. No, wait! It's not a boy friend. (Mustering her confession.) Actually, it's my patient. From the State Hospital. The one I've been assigned to in Dr. Meyer's class for the Community Outreach Program.

HERDIS. But, Leslie — (She is opening the door.)

LESLIE. Wait. Listen. I want to explain. This patient is supposed to stay with me for a whole week so I can take him around and let him experience the real world. I just picked him up this morning.

MAGDA. Where's he going to stay, Leslie?

LESLIE. Dr. Meyer has arranged a room for him at the dorm. But I have full responsibility.

HERDIS. Well, that sounds wonderful, Leslie. Your first really needy person. I'm sure he'll make you very happy, dear.

LESLIE. No! You don't understand. (Not knowing how to explain, groping for words, embarrassed.) He makes me sick, Aunt Herdis. I feel just sick. (HERDIS rushes to LESLIE and holds her in her arms.)

HERDIS. Poor dear.

LESLIE. It's awful. The whole thing has been terrible. I've

never seen anyone like him. (She breaks down, crying.) It's just . . . well . . . pathetic. (MAGDA gets up and goes over to the window to look out.)

HERDIS (alarmed). Is he dangerous, Leslie?

LESLIE. No, no. He's harmless.

MAGDA. Why, it's a little boy, Herdis. How old is he?

LESLIE. Twelve.

HERDIS. Well, for goodness sake, tell us what's the matter with him, dear.

LESLIE. He's blind.

MAGDA (moving toward the door). For God's sake, we can't leave him out there alone.

LESLIE (blocking the door). Just one more minute, please, Aunt Magda. I want you to know it all. (Becoming very serious, swallowing hard.) He's retarded. He's lived at the hospital all his life. He can't speak. He just sort of grunts. I don't understand any of it. And his eyes. I can't bear to look at them. (Breaking down again.) I mean it. His condition, his appearance, even his behavior . . . it's pathetic.

MAGDA (opening the door). Really, Leslie. It's hard to tell whose behavior is more pathetic, his or yours. (She exits.)

LESLIE (to a more sympathetic HERDIS). At the hospital they told me he's been blind since birth. Dr. Meyer wrote up a case history for me to read. (She takes it out of the briefcase.) I haven't had the heart to look at it. (She sets it down on the coffee table.) Do you know, Aunt Herdis, that when blind children are old enough to realize their eyes don't work like everyone else's, they sometimes try to scratch them out? Isn't that tragic? I feel so sorry for him. I just don't think I can be of any help. I feel almost paralyzed by his misery. (She breaks down again.)

HERDIS. You're just too sensitive for this case, dear.

(MAGDA brings RICK into the room.)

MAGDA. There now. How about a cup of coffee, Herdis, to warm him up? (HERDIS goes off to the kitchen.)
What's his name?

LESLIE. Rick.

MAGDA. Okay, now, Rick, let's sit you down right here. (She guides RICK to the couch and seats him. She unbuttons his coat and takes off his gloves. She feels his hands.) You're frozen.

LESLIE. Maybe we better turn up the heat.

MAGDA (looking at furnace). No, we better not. The furnace has been a little temperamental lately. Let's use a blanket. (She takes an afghan from the couch and puts it over RICK and begins to rub his hands.) How's the coffee, Herdis?

HERDIS (off). In just a minute. Is the boy comfortable?

MAGDA (letting go of Rick's hands and stepping back). I think so.

(RICK begins to rock back and forth, bending from the waist. HERDIS comes out of the kitchen. HERDIS and MAGDA stand, staring at Rick's rocking.)

HERDIS. Have we done something wrong, Leslie?

LESLIE. No. Not at all. He rocks like that all the time. I told you, it's sad. It's part of his condition . . . both his physical and mental problems . . . along with the institutional environment. There's nothing you can do. (A knock at the door.)

HERDIS (looking out the window). It's Lou, from across the street.

LESLIE. The retired warmonger? Don't let him in!

HERDIS. I wish you wouldn't call him that, Leslie.

LESLIE. Oh, he's just an old baffoon.

MAGDA. What makes you say that?

LESLIE. He spent his whole life in the Navy. What can you possibly get from that?