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Dramatic Publishing



A Comedy in One Act
by
F. LEE MIESLE

Bench 18

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(BENCH 18)

Bench 18

A Comedy in One Act

FOR FIVE MEN AND FOUR WOMEN

CHARACTERS

SAMMY

THE OFFICER

A TRAMP

A BOY

JULIA

LADY WITH A BUGGY

A GIRL

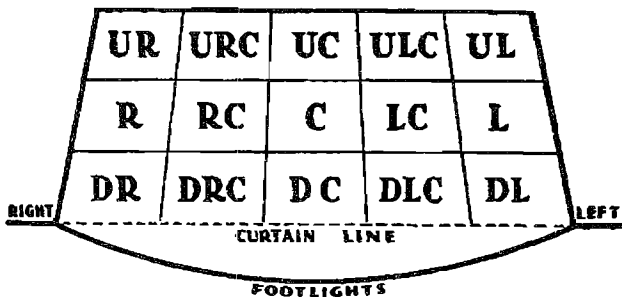
A GENTLEMAN

A BLONDE

PLACE: *A small section of a public park.*

TIME: *A summer evening.*

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: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, 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.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Park bench, ground-row of bushes, trash can or barrel.

SAMMY: White carnation, letter, wrist watch, pack of cigarettes, wallet with five-dollar bill.

OFFICER: Night stick.

JULIA: White corsage.

TRAMP: Matches.

BOY: Ball.

LADY: Baby buggy, tiny handkerchief.

GENTLEMAN: Cane, white carnation.

BLONDE: White corsage.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

Bench 18

SCENE: *A secluded section of a park on a summer evening. Although this is really an expansive park, a few items will serve to identify it. The most important item is a park bench at C stage, facing the audience, with the numeral "18" clearly inscribed upon it. A small ground-row of bushes is near the bench, to the left and slightly upstage of it. A trash can or barrel to the right and also slightly upstage of the bench would help to establish the atmosphere. An imaginary walk wends its way past the bench, several feet in front of it, with entrances from D R and D L stage.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It's been a lovely day—not too hot, not too cool. Now, it's about seven in the evening, still quite light, and it seems a bit unusual to find a spot like this uninhabited—but it won't be for long. Along the sidewalk from D R come hurrying footsteps, and into view comes SAMMY PETERS. SAMMY is a young man, in his twenties. He's not good-looking, but no one would deny that he's pleasant-looking. He is dressed in what obviously must be his best clothes, and he wears a white carnation in his lapel. When he sees the bench, he stops D R C, pulls a letter from his pocket, hurriedly checks the contents and then the number on the bench. A smile of relief wreaths his face, and he reads:]*

SAMMY [*to himself*]. "Be at bench eighteen in Elmwood Park, wearing a white carnation, at 7:00 P.M." [*He glances at his watch.*] This is bench eighteen—it's ten minutes to seven. I'm all set. [*Reconnoiters bench carefully, looking at it from all angles. He sits tentatively on bench, inspects the view, and changes position of bench minutely. He sits*

down again, stares critically, then—satisfied—relaxes, the smile still wreathing his face.}]

[SAMMY has barely settled into position when footsteps are heard off D L. SAMMY leaps to his feet, nervously adjusts his tie, and looks expectantly down the sidewalk. But these are weary, plodding footsteps, and a moment later, a POLICE OFFICER comes into view, D L, idly swinging his stick. SAMMY speaks to him, in a cheerful voice—an almost excessively cheerful voice.]

SAMMY. Hello, Officer! Lovely evening—yes, sir, lovely evening!

OFFICER [*slowly approaching bench; he speaks with an Irish brogue*]. Oh, I dunno. They're all alike, somehow. When y've tromped as many cement miles as I have, sure, nothin' looks very lovely.

SAMMY [*still cheerful*]. It seems to me I've never seen a more beautiful evening—yes, sir!

OFFICER. I'll enjoy it a lot more when I can take off me shoes and set in the porch swing and smoke me pipe. That is—if me old lady will let me set down. More than likely she'll be wantin' to run off to a movin' picture, or be goin' fer a ride.

SAMMY. I'll bet she'll be waiting for you with a nice supper, and your slippers, and——

OFFICER [*interrupting, dryly*]. 'Tis plain to see you don't know me wife. And 'tis plain to see that you're a bit off yer trolley. Been out in the sun all day, maybe?

SAMMY [*with a luxurious stretch, moving D R C*]. Nope. It's just that it's a lovely evening—yes, sir, a lovely evening.

OFFICER [*holding up a hand*]. Don't tell me! You're meetin' a girl. I can tell the signs.

SAMMY [*smugly*]. Well—maybe I am.

OFFICER [*moving toward him*]. You'll learn, me boy, you'll learn. It's the evenin' and the kisses you're thinkin' of now—but wait'll you marry her, and yer feet hurt and she wants

to go dancin'—then it'll be different. [*Shakes his head wisely—and sadly.*]

SAMMY. Maybe . . .

OFFICER. Yeah, sure—they're all different. But feet are the same, the world over, and they still hurt when a body's been on 'em all day. [*Moves past him, toward D R.*]

SAMMY. I don't care. It's still a lovely evening. [*Moves over in front of bench.*]

OFFICER [*pausing*]. Man, you've got it bad. [*Moves back toward him.*] Sure—a white posy and everything. [*Slightly sarcastic.*] Is the weddin' tonight, maybe?

SAMMY. I wish it were.

OFFICER. Well, take the word of one who knows, and postpone it as long as you can.

SAMMY [*dreaming*]. Maybe I'll ask her tonight. Maybe I will—if things go right. [*Looks at his watch.*] Five of.

OFFICER. Late, is she? Sure, that's somethin' you gotta get used to. They're always late, except when you want 'em to be, and then they're ten minutes early.

SAMMY. No, she's not late. You haven't seen her, have you—a girl with a white corsage?

OFFICER [*reflecting*]. A white corsage? I don't remember. Maybe. [*Turns to him.*] Short or tall?

SAMMY [*shaking his head*]. I don't know.

OFFICER. You don't know? Blonde or brunette?

SAMMY [*shaking his head*]. I don't know.

OFFICER. You don't know? What kind of female is this?

SAMMY [*sbrugging*]. I don't know what she looks like. I've never seen her.

OFFICER. You—— Wha—you never seen her? [*SAMMY shakes his head.*] Never seen her, and you stand snivelin' 'bout byootiful evenin's and proposin'? You are daft. [*Starts briskly D R.*]

SAMMY [*moving after him*]. What does it matter how she looks? I know her—I know all I need to know. How she thinks, how she feels, how she——

OFFICER. Listen, me boy—listen. Whither y've been meetin' her in dark alleys, or when you were blind drunk—don't do anything rash 'til you see her.

SAMMY. But that doesn't matter. I *know* her. I know her every thought, her every secret.

OFFICER. Maybe she's got a nice personality, huh?

SAMMY [*sbrugging, as he moves back to bench*]. I don't know.

OFFICER [*following*]. Or a voice like a lark, maybe?

SAMMY [*sbrugging*]. I don't know.

OFFICER [*losing patience*]. Where in the name of blazes did you meet such a woman?

SAMMY. Through our letters. [*Sits on bench.*]

OFFICER. Letters—*letters*! Oh-ho! A lonely hearts club member, are you?

SAMMY. No—it was much less ordinary than that.

OFFICER [*standing right of bench*]. Sure—it's always less ordinary. [*Puts one foot up on bench as he continues.*] Listen, me boy—all me life I've waited to give somebody this piece of advice. Let me tell you. I don't care where you got her name—don't do it. Once, a long time ago, I walked into a store and bought a package of doughnuts—the iced kind. When I opened the box, there on the back of the lid was a name—Gertie O'Hara, 15278 West Meridan Street. Please write, it said. I please wrote—fer a year I wrote, and finally one night, blind drunk, I went to her house. Had I not been so drunk, I could have seen why she'd not let me come to see her all that year. But it was too late. When I woke up next mornin'—there she was, as ugly as sin—me wife! Believe me, laddie, that was the most expensive package of doughnuts a man ever bought.

SAMMY [*unmoved, rising nervously, glancing at watch*]. She'll be here any minute—it's almost seven now.

OFFICER [*shaking his head*]. Ah, 'tis a pity, 'tis a pity. A fine lad, too. Mark me words, you'll not be able to stand the sight of a park bench after this day, just like I can't stand the sight of a doughnut, plain, sugared, or iced. [*Walks out D R, shaking his head, muttering sadly to himself.*]

watches him go with a tolerant smile, glances at his watch again.]

[Just then, a head pops up from behind the bushes. It is an unkempt head, with a worn hat atop it, and a slightly grimy face with a generous growth of stubble.]

TRAMP. Psssst! *[SAMMY looks about, startled, locates source of noise.]*

SAMMY. Hello!

TRAMP. Is the bull gone?

SAMMY. Who?

TRAMP. The flatfoot, the cop—is he gone?

SAMMY *[glancing D R]*. Why—yes.

TRAMP. Aaaah! *[Comes out from behind bushes, stretching. He is a typical bum: poorly dressed, a bit soiled, much wrinkled. He comes to bench, and sits gratefully on it, the left end.]* The ground was gettin' mighty hard—yes, sirree, mighty hard.

SAMMY *[anxiously]*. You're not going to sit there?

TRAMP. I sure am, buddy. I musta skinned half my leg, crawlin' behind bushes, tryin' to get away from that cop.

SAMMY. But—but you can't sit there!

TRAMP. Why can't I? The benches are free, ain't they? *[Suspiciously.]* Say—you ain't plainclothes, are ya?

SAMMY. No, I'm not plainclothes—but you still can't sit there.

TRAMP *[ignoring him]*. Sing out if he comes back, will ya, buddy? I'm gonna take ten. *[He slides comfortably down in bench, yawns mightily, and prepares to nap.]*

SAMMY. Look here, have a heart, will you? Can't you find another bench?

TRAMP *[opening one eye]*. Not as out of the way as this one, buddy.

SAMMY. But you *can't* stay here.

TRAMP. Quit yer yappin' and let me sleep, will ya? *[Settles back again.]*

SAMMY. But this is important.

TRAMP [*starting to sit up again*]. It ain't important that I get my sleep, I s'pose?

SAMMY. Sure, it is, but——

TRAMP [*now sitting up straight*]. Listen—that's the trouble with you guys. Ya think that just because a guy likes to travel around a little bit, he ain't got no rights. Well, I'm a citizen and a taxpayer, see. I bought a pack of cigarettes just last week, and there was enough stamps on it to buy two benches like this one. And ya think that because I ain't sittin' on my can in an office, or runnin' a machine all day, that I don't get tired. Well, I do. Believe me, buddy, it's more trouble to avoid work than it is to do it. Now leave me alone. [*Starts to settle back again.*]

SAMMY. I believe all that. It's just that I'm meeting someone here and I'd like to be alone.

TRAMP [*sleepily, eyes closed*]. Whatsa matter? Ain't I dressed up good enough to suit ya? Just because I ain't got a tie on—[*Starts to sit up again.*]—d'ya know it's unhealthy to wear ties? Cuts off yer air. Makes ya dry up? [*In exasperation, SAMMY takes a few steps D R C.*] I had a uncle once—biggest, fattest guy you'd ever wanna see. Then he started to wear ties. Began to dry up like that—[*Snaps his fingers.*]—and it wasn't long 'til they planted him six feet under. Can't tell me it wasn't the ties that did it.

SAMMY [*pleadingly*]. Look—you had a girl once. Didn't you like to be alone with her?

TRAMP. Oh, a girl, huh? Well—I know how ya feel, buddy, but still—— Say, got a cigarette? [*Makes pretense of feeling pockets.*] I seem to be clear out. [SAMMY, *in exasperation, hands him a pack. TRAMP takes one and then nonchalantly pockets pack.*] Thanks, I got matches. [*Lights one, takes a long puff, and exhales with complete satisfaction.*] Ahhh! [*Looks at cigarette.*] They taste so different from a package. Now where were we? Oh, yeah, girls. You're a right guy, buddy. I'll tell ya something about girls. Stay away from 'em.