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Dramatic Publishing

Don't Count on Forever

A Full-Length Play

By

NANCY GILSENAN



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois"

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(DON'T COUNT ON FOREVER)

ISBN 0-87129-391-9

DON'T COUNT ON FOREVER
A Full-Length Play
For Nine Women and Eight Men

CHARACTERS

LISA SOLHEIM a high school senior
JOAN SOLHEIM Lisa's mother
FRANK SOLHEIM Lisa's father
TEDDY Lisa's boy friend, also a senior
KIM
BILL
MARILYN
TRACY
MIKE a football player
CAPTAIN captain of the football team
ELAINE Frank Solheim's girl friend
KIM'S PARENTS
BILL'S PARENTS
MARILYN'S PARENTS

TIME: The present.

PLACE: The Solheim's living room and the office
of the Sentinel

SET DESCRIPTION

The play can be produced with one set by using simple area staging and bringing the lights up and then down on each scene. There are five areas:

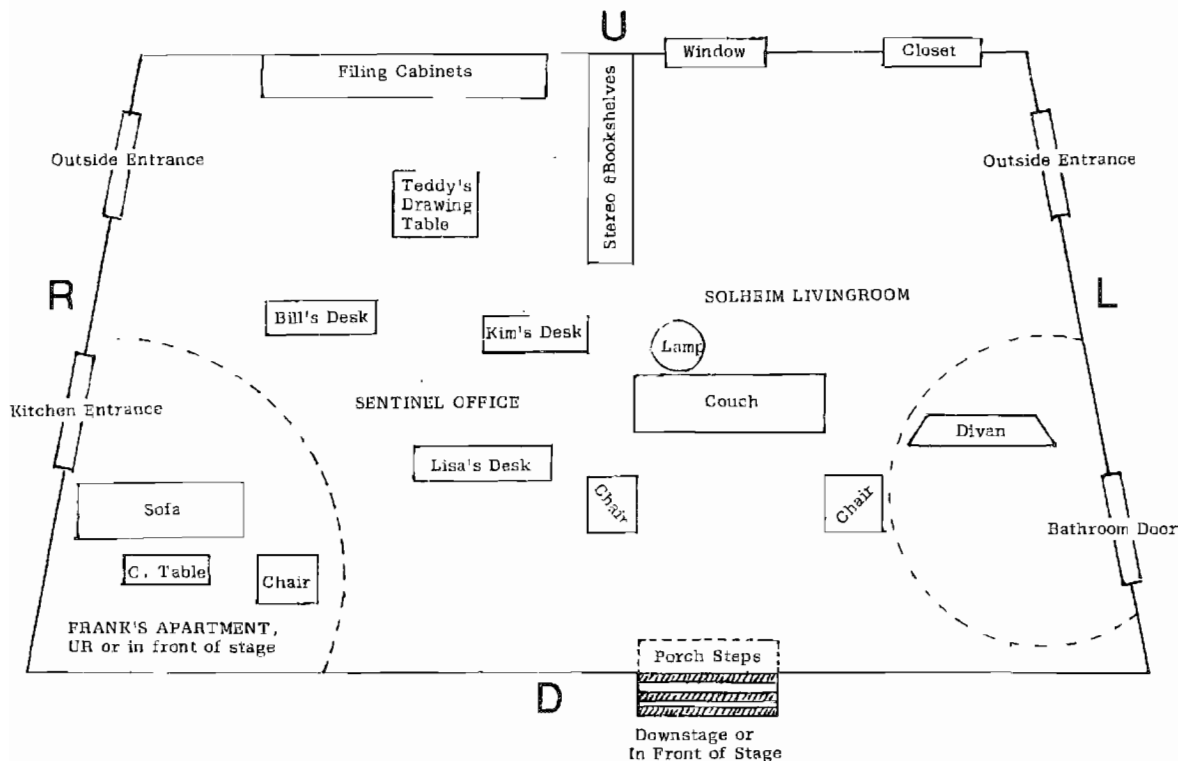
The bathroom door area is located downstage far left. This is a small area requiring only the outside of a door with a mirror on it and a divan or small couch near the door.

The Solheim living room occupies the rest of the left area of the stage. There is a couch center stage with a chair on either side of it and a reading lamp near the stage right chair. The main entrance is upstage left. A window and closet door are in the upstage wall. A stereo, record collection, and book shelves are near center stage, forming the stage right wall of the room.

The yearbook office covers the stage right half of the stage. Lisa's desk is in the center of the office downstage. Upstage and to the right is Bill's desk. Upstage and to the left is Kim's desk. Teddy's drawing table is upstage center in back of Lisa's desk, but it is higher. Filing cabinets line the upstage wall. The entrance to the office is along the upstage right wall.

The porch steps are in front of the living room stage left and in front of the stage. When this portion of the set is used it requires only a spotlight and steps.

Frank's apartment is located on the stage right side [or in front of the stage.] The kitchen entrance is stage right and the outside entrance is stage left. It is furnished with a couch, a coffee table, and a chair.



ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AS LIGHTS COME UP: LISA is standing in front of the bathroom door DL. Papers are strewn across the divan and floor. She takes several steps back from the mirror, holds a sheet of paper out in front of her, clears her throat, and begins to read in a serious tone. [JOAN is sitting in the darkened living room.]

LISA. It is a tradition at graduation — (She stops, looks around, finds a folder or book, and places it on her head like a mortarboard. She resumes reading.) As we look forward — (She stops, looks around again, sees an Afghan on the divan, picks it up, and wraps it around her like a robe or gown. In a serious monotone.) As we look forward to promising futures, and our coming of age in the adult world — No, no. That's too dry. I have to catch their attention, rivet them in their seats. (She resumes with a loud, low voice and exaggerated gestures.) As we look forward to promising futures and our coming of age in the adult world — No, that sounds too Napoleon, I guess. (She clears her throat.) Maybe I should try to capture them with intrigue, be more seductive. (She adjusts the Afghan by letting it droop over one shoulder. She turns slightly sideways, cocks the mortarboard, moves closer to the mirror on the bathroom door, whispers.) As we look forward to promising futures, and our coming of age in the

adult world —

JOAN (calling from the living room). Lisa!

LISA. Just a minute, Mom. (She looks back into the mirror.) That's definitely not it. It needs more sincerity, down to earth. I think I'll try "honest and open." (She stands up straight, looks directly into the mirror, smiles a little too sweetly.) My fellow graduates and *good* friends, our wonderful parents, our devoted teachers. Welcome! I really mean that, welcome!

JOAN. Lisa!

LISA. Okay, I'm coming. (As she picks up her papers.) I wonder if anyone has ever given the commencement address in sign language. (Lights fade to black in bathroom area.)

(Lights come up on the living room of the Solheim house. It is late evening. The room is lit only by the single reading lamp. Classical music plays on the stereo. JOAN sits reading and smoking in the chair nearest the lamp. Occasionally she looks up from her book and stares thoughtfully into the darkened room. LISA crosses from the bathroom area into the living room.)

LISA. Did you want me, Mom?

JOAN (continuing to read). It's bedtime, Lisa.

LISA. Why is it so dark in here? I can hardly see. What're you doing?

JOAN. Just waiting up for Dad.

LISA. Again? Another union meeting?

JOAN (still reading). Um-hum. (LISA turns on the overhead lights, then turns off the stereo.)

LISA. Mom, you have to stop this. (She takes the book from JOAN.) What are you reading? *The Idiot*. Another Russian novel. I thought so. Why do you keep reading and listening to this kind of stuff lately? It's the pits, Mom, pure depression.

JOAN. True, but some of the finest depression ever written, Lisa. Nobody takes you down like Wagner, and nobody hits bottom like Dostoevski. (LISA puts the book back on the bookshelf and puts the record away.)

LISA. You're getting yourself into a real rut these past few months. You have to get away from these Russian writers and German composers. You better switch to something a little more upbeat — like Jane Austen, Tolkein, or *Winnie the Pooh*. (She walks back to JOAN, takes the cigarette out of her hand, puts it out in the ashtray.) And you have to stop this, too.

JOAN. Did you come to kiss me good night, Lisa, or are you here to launch a reform movement?

LISA (walking over to open a window). How can you breathe? We'll need a gale wind to clear this place out.

JOAN. Close the window, Lisa. You haven't graduated yet. I'm still running the air around here. (LISA closes the window. JOAN lights another cigarette.)

LISA. It's those non-filters, Mom. They're real killers. (She goes over to the closet.) You could try a menthol brand, you know? (Takes a can of air freshener from the closet.) Or how about at least one of the filter tips? Think of your lungs, Mom. Think of my lungs, and Dad's. (She begins to spray the room [with what is actually a water solution — air spray is flammable] and sprays the length of the couch, under throw pillows, the rug, the lamp.) You better start worrying about your health. You know what happens to people when they get to be forty.

JOAN. I'm not forty!

LISA. Let's face it, you're in the ball park. It's time to get serious about this age thing. You need more exercise. Why don't you take up running with Dad?

JOAN. Given a choice, I'd prefer the electric chair. It's much quicker and you don't have to buy a velour sweatsuit to do it.

LISA (continuing to spray). All right. What about bowling?
That wouldn't hurt too much.

JOAN. Please, Lisa. Human beings should never wear shoes with little numbers on the heel. We were made for better things.

LISA. Yoga, then. That's good for the body, and it's intellectual, right?

JOAN. Wrong. Yoga is just a front for the multi-national food conglomerates. It was invented twelve years ago in a warehouse in southern Kansas to sell wheat germ and alfalfa sprouts.

LISA (throwing up her hands). You're nuts, Mom. (She turns on JOAN, aims the spray bottle.) Freeze! Now put your hands up, slowly. (As JOAN does so, LISA takes the cigarette out of her hand and puts it out. Then she sprays both of Joan's raised hands.) There. You're purified — at least for the moment. At ease.

JOAN (smelling her hands). Oh, Lisa, I smell like a public toilet.

LISA (putting the air freshener away). It's an improvement. Take my word for it.

JOAN. I turn into the Wicked Witch of the West in two minutes. I'd exit for bed if I were you.

LISA. In a minute. But first, would you take a look at the Editor's Essay I'm writing for the yearbook?

JOAN. What's the Editor's Essay? (LISA takes a piece of paper from her pocket. She sits down on the arm of Joan's chair.)

LISA. Every year the editor of the Sentinel writes a piece for the front page of the yearbook, and then reads it at graduation. I'm supposed to reflect on school and growing up and that sort of thing.

JOAN. Ah, the class eulogy, so to speak.

LISA. Will you cut that out, Mom? Just read this. (She hands the paper to JOAN.) I only have the first few lines so far. But don't mess with the ideas. I just want you to check on my grammar.

JOAN (reading for a moment, nodding with approval). Very nice, Lisa. You could try to sound a little less cocky –

LISA. I said no reviews.

JOAN. Right. Well, let's see. Not too much damage so far. A cursory glance shows you've split two infinitives, dangled one preposition, and mixed a metaphor. Otherwise you can rest easy.

LISA. Fix it, will you, Mom?

JOAN. You can fix this, Lisa.

LISA. I know, but it would take me half an hour to figure out how to correct it. You can do it in a minute.

JOAN. All right, if you promise to go to bed afterward.

LISA. I promise. (As JOAN works.) Why didn't you ever finish college, Mom?

JOAN. I decided to get married instead.

LISA. Why should that have stopped you?

JOAN. Oh, because your dad hadn't been to college at all.

LISA. So?

JOAN. So, men generally do not marry women who are better educated than they are.

LISA. That's stupid.

JOAN. Well, they don't marry women who are taller or older, either. It may be stupid, but it's true. So, when I married your dad I agreed to remain a year younger, three inches shorter and to quit school. That seemed to make him happy.

LISA. What did you want to be – in college, I mean?

JOAN. I don't know for sure. I wanted to work in publishing, I think.

LISA. To be a writer?

JOAN. Oh, no, a reader. I love to read other people's ideas, to look for new talent, to discover good manuscripts. (She smiles as she corrects Lisa's work.) And somebody has to protect the language from all you writers.

LISA. Is that why you let the Arts Guild dump their quarterly on you all the time?

JOAN. I consider it an act of mercy, Lisa. If I didn't volunteer to check over everything those little old ladies write, English grammar, as we know it, would be dead in two years.

LISA. They think you're a saint. I love it when they give you all their crocheting at the Appreciation Banquet each fall. Piles of it.

JOAN. If the doily market ever takes off, I'll be a rich woman.

LISA. You could get a job in publishing now, couldn't you?

JOAN. I need a degree. I only went to the university for a year. And by the time I finished, I still wouldn't have any experience, and . . . (She hands the paper back to LISA.) . . . I'd have to compete with people, well, like you, for a job.

LISA (kissing JOAN on the cheek). Thanks. Actually, I'm glad you didn't go into publishing.

JOAN. Oh?

LISA. It would have kept you from becoming the perfect mother.

JOAN. Ah, and how do you know I'm the perfect mother?

LISA. Because you have raised the perfect child.

JOAN. Take your ego to bed, Lisa, before it weighs down the rest of your body and you can't get it out of the room.

LISA. Let me wait up for Dad.

JOAN. Uh-uh. He may not be back for hours.

LISA. What are all these union meetings?

(FRANK enters UL.)

FRANK. Politics, kitten, the worst kind of meetings you can think of. Men with big bellies and big cigars squatting around a big table making big deals. It's terrible stuff. (He goes to hang up his coat in the closet.) You don't want to know about it. (He sniffs the air.) Why does the living room smell like embalming fluid?

JOAN. The public health department was just here.

LISA. Are you going to run for office, Dad? (FRANK walks over to the other chair at left.)

FRANK. Maybe. I'd be on the union's executive committee. I wouldn't be just a carpenter any more. Sometimes I'd even have to wear a suit to work.

LISA. You never wear a suit.

FRANK. A whole new image, huh? You wanna help me pick one out?

LISA. Oh, I love blazers, Dad, double-breasted, blue, with white pants.

FRANK. Hey, sounds like I'd need a silk scarf and saddle shoes. No, I gotta look sharp, kitten. Get us a catalogue.

JOAN. Hold it. Every time you two start feeding one another's egos, it goes on for hours.

LISA. We could just pick the color.

FRANK. What about light brown? How would that go with my eyes?

JOAN. Oh, no. It's time for at least one of you to put your ambitions to bed. Good night, Lisa.

FRANK. We'll do it tomorrow, kitten. Good night. (LISA kisses both of them good night.)

LISA (about to exit). Oh, Mom, can we have Teddy over to dinner next week? I think he wants to ask me to the prom. I'd like to give him the opportunity, you know?

JOAN. Oh, that's clever. And what am I serving, roast leg of sitting duck?

LISA. Please, Mom. He's been wanting to meet you. I told him what a good cook you are, and how much Dad likes having people over. It'll be fun.

JOAN. All right. A week from Friday.

LISA. Thanks. (Exiting, then turning back.) Seriously, Mom, keep it simple — sirloin tips with bernaise sauce, creamed asparagus, mushrooms and wild rice.

JOAN. Down, Lisa. (She points out of the room.)

LISA. We can send out for dessert. A little torte or something.

JOAN. Out!

LISA. Gotcha. (She exits. As soon as Lisa exits, FRANK

picks up the newspaper, sits down in the stage left chair and begins to read.)

JOAN (carefully). How was the meeting, Frank? Are you going to run?

FRANK (leafing through the paper). I think so. Looks like they want to put me up for secretary-treasurer.

JOAN. Secretary-treasurer? Does that mean you'll have to take notes?

FRANK. No, it's just a title. We get a woman from the union office to come and write up the meetings. I don't think most of us could write a letter to our mothers if we had to. That's the thing that makes me so proud of Lisa, you know, she's gonna go to college.

JOAN. Sometimes I think I'd like to go back.

FRANK. Well, we certainly can't afford to send two people. In fact, this might be the time for you to get a job, Joan, with Lisa gone next year. You've got the housework down to a science. Maybe you should go to work.

JOAN. Doing what?

FRANK. Get an office job. You can type, can't you? And you're a great speller. Start at one of those temporary places.

JOAN. I wouldn't make much money at that, Frank.

FRANK. You don't have to earn a lot, just enough to pay some of the new expenses.

JOAN (thinking). But if I went back to school I could probably get a good job, a professional job that really pays.

FRANK. What do you need a professional job for? I'm just talking about something to tide us over until we get Lisa through college. (He puts the paper aside.) I make plenty of money, Joan, that's not the issue. I'm just talking about a job to keep you busy and give us some extra income, that's all I'm saying.

JOAN. And all I'm saying is I'd like to work at something I would enjoy.

FRANK. So, why wouldn't you enjoy office work? It'd be easy

for somebody like you. You spend most of your time around here reading or working crossword puzzles anyway. So, you could be typing instead. What's the big difference?

JOAN (shaking her head, resigned). You don't understand, Frank.

FRANK (bristling). Sure I understand. You don't want to get out, Joan.

JOAN (laughing). You sound like Lisa. She wants me to take up bowling.

FRANK. Why not? What's wrong with bowling?

JOAN (knowing an argument is coming). Nothing, Frank.

FRANK (rising, angry). Oh, I know, you think bowling is *stupid*, you can't stand clubs, except your [goddamned] Book of the Month Club —

JOAN. I'm just not a joiner —

FRANK. You say that all the time. You'd rather sit here and listen to music, or read, or — or think.

JOAN. Thinking's not a sin, Frank. There are people who devote an entire lifetime to it.

FRANK. Yeah, but what about your social life? You oughta get out and be with people. It's just like parties. You never wanna have anybody from work over any more.

JOAN. We've been through this, Frank. I've had all those people over. I've done my share. But they're *your* friends, Frank, people you work with. They're just not like me.

FRANK. And who's like you? Those old ladies at the Guild?

JOAN. They're interesting. They read.

FRANK. Or those kids you hang around with — that jazz group that plays at the theatre.

JOAN. There's nothing wrong with musicians.

FRANK. They're not even close to your age. What do you have in common with those people? Why can't you like some normal people — who work at regular jobs? People more like — me!

JOAN (sincerely). I like you, Frank. I want to like your friends,

and I do. They're nice people. But – oh, God, why do we have to go over this again? – I have nothing to say to them. I feel like I'm on an island at those parties, and I can't quite reach anybody there.

FRANK. You wanna know the truth? I think you're getting worse. I think you're burying yourself in those books and that music. I think you better get out, Joan. Get yourself a job, a regular job with normal people. And I think you better start changing. Like me. I'm changing. When things get bad, I don't sit around and brood about it. I don't *think*, Joan, I *do*. That's the only way to be happy.

JOAN. But I am happy, Frank. You're the one who's making me unhappy. I don't want to change.

FRANK. You think I'm stupid, don't you? You could've married somebody with more brains.

JOAN. No. I love you, Frank.

FRANK. I don't think so.

JOAN. Don't say that, please.

FRANK. It's true, though. I didn't turn out to be the kind of person you wanted.

JOAN. Stop it, Frank. This always ends badly.

FRANK (rising). I'm going for a drive. (As he reaches the door.)

JOAN. Max Rayburn called a little while ago. (FRANK stops.) He said the union meeting was over two hours ago. He thought you'd be home.

FRANK. I'll call him in the morning away. (He turns away.) It's getting harder and harder for me to come home, Joan.

JOAN. I can tell, Frank. It's getting harder and harder for me to wait. (FRANK exits, closing the door quietly behind him. JOAN leans back in her chair, distraught, near breaking. She lights a cigarette, picks up a book, but cannot read.)

(LISA enters.)

LISA (looking around the room). I forgot my essay. (She finds

it.) Where's Dad?

JOAN (trying to control her voice). Gone for a drive.

LISA (as if she knows there's been a fight). Oh. You okay, Mom? (JOAN nods "yes.") Want me to stay here for awhile? (JOAN shakes head "no." LISA kisses her.) Good night, Mom. (As LISA exits the lights fade to black. JOAN exits in the darkness.)

SCENE TWO

Lights come up on the office of the Silvercreek Sentinel Yearbook at R. BILL sits at his desk, piled high with papers, photos, and trophies, talking to MIKE, who stands next to him. BILL is dressed in a letterman's jacket, jeans, and running shoes. MIKE is the hefty, muscular type and is dressed in a football jersey and gym shorts. KIM sits at her desk working intently at a typewriter. TEDDY sits at a drawing table. He is having a heated discussion with MARILYN, who is standing over him. TEDDY is conservatively dressed in slacks and shirt. MARILYN wears heavy hiking boots, blue jeans and a blouse covered by an ammunition vest. She carries two cameras over her shoulder. LISA is seated at a desk marked "Editor." As the scene opens, she is concluding a conversation with TRACY, and the phone on her desk is ringing.

LISA (to TEDDY and MARILYN). Will you two keep it down? (To TRACY.) Now, why do you want a picture of a souffle in the yearbook?

TRACY. The cooking club's never done anything like this before – at least anything that turned out. You really have to see this, Lisa. It's nineteen-and-a-half inches high. (As the phone continues to ring LISA jots down a note.)

LISA. And you say it's spinach and ham? I'll see what I can do, Tracy. We're a little tied up right now, and I've got a staff meeting in five minutes. Maybe I can send a photographer down a little later, okay?

TRACY (starting to exit). Well, I'd hurry if I were you. I'm not sure it can hold much longer. (She exits.)

LISA (to TEDDY and MARILYN). Quiet! (She answers the phone.) Sentinel Office . . . Yes, Mrs. Lundin, we're interviewing the clerical staff in the principal's office at four o'clock today . . . (BILL leaves MIKE and walks over to Lisa's desk.)

BILL. Hey, Lisa . . .

LISA (waving him off). No, Mrs. Lundin, we're not going to put you in the same picture as the bus drivers this year. Yes, I realize that offends the women who take the attendance records. . . . I will . . .

BILL. Lisa!

LISA. Yes, Mrs. Lundin, I do intend to ask for a quote from you. We always ask for a quote from the head clerk. We'll use it as a cut line under the picture. That's right. . . . Thank you for calling. Good-bye. (She hangs up the phone.)

BILL. Listen, Lisa, the football team wants to be shot without their shirts on. Whad'ya think?

LISA. What?

BILL. The captain of the team sent Mike over here to tell me he wants us to take the team picture in the nude, you know, from the waist up. It'd be like the swim team, only with knee pads.

LISA (firmly). No, Bill.

BILL. We could use kind of a he-man pose. They all got great chests—

LISA (stronger). I said no, Bill.

BILL. Come on, Lisa, these books are gonna last a lifetime. Those bodies are only good for another five or six years. Have a heart.