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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# **Break a Leg**

A Full-Length Play

By

**JOHN O'BRIEN**



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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JOHN O'BRIEN

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(BREAK A LEG)

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BREAK A LEG  
*A Full-Length Play*  
*for Four Men, Twelve Women, Extras*

C H A R A C T E R S

Polly O'Connor, Les Peterson, Larry, Harry, Gertrude, Maggie,  
Molly, Annie, Judy, Susan, Jennifer

The Author

The Dancer

The Male Voice

The Sea Captain, The Bride and Groom

*Romeo and Juliet*

*Portia* (Merchant of Venice)

*Shylock*

*Hamlet*

*Macbeth*

*Lady Macbeth*

*Seton*

*Doctor of Physic*

*Waiting/Gentlewoman*

*Portia* (Julius Caesar)

*Caesar*

*Brutus*

*Marc Antony*

*Calpurnia*

*The Three Witches*

The Director

The Stage Manager

Dancers and Stagehands

TIME: The Present

PLACE: Tilton High School Stage

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## ACT ONE

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SCENE: A high school stage.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: There is pandemonium as a small army of Monsieur Hulots is trying to build a set that resembles a room. There are doors L and R, with French doors UC. To add to the bedlam, the ACTORS are performing voice exercises, yoga exercises, and meditation exercises. OTHERS are putting on makeup. POLLY enters down a side aisle and walks onto the stage.

POLLY (looking around the stage). All right, everybody, this is it. Lester? Lester? Lester? . . . Lester? . . . Lester? . . . Lester? . . . Oh, Les?

(LES enters.)

LES. You called?

POLLY. Seven times.

LES. I only heard you once.

POLLY. Your name isn't Lester?

LES. My name is Gregory.

POLLY. I know it's none of my business, but if your name is Gregory, why do they call you Les?

HARRY. Because he's good at arithmetic.

LARRY (as LES exits). Especially subtraction.

HARRY and LARRY. Yuk, yuk, yuk.

POLLY. Tell me he didn't say that. (HARRY turns and faces upstage. He raises an imaginary baton and the STAGEHANDS and ACTORS turn to face him.)

ALL. He didn't say that.

POLLY. Thank you.

LES. Any more questions?

POLLY. No more questions.

JUDY. I have a question.

POLLY. What is it?

JUDY. How did *you* know?

POLLY. How did I know what?

JUDY. My question.

POLLY. What question?

JUDY. What is it?

POLLY. What is what?

JUDY. This. (She holds up a strange object.)

POLLY. I don't know.

JUDY. Who does?

POLLY. Ask the stage manager.

JUDY. I did.

POLLY. What did she say?

JUDY. She said to ask the prop girl.

POLLY. What did she say?

JUDY. I'm the prop girl.

HARRY. Maybe it was left here from Junior Varieties.

LARRY. When in doubt, blame a junior.

HARRY. I blame my father.

LARRY. What for?

HARRY. He gave me his name.

LARRY. What's wrong with that?

HARRY. I'll be a junior all my life.

HARRY and LARRY. Yuk, yuk, yuk.

POLLY. Tell me he didn't say that. (HARRY turns upstage and raises the imaginary baton again. ALL turn toward him.)

ALL. He didn't say that.

POLLY. Thank you.

JUDY. I still don't know what it is.

HARRY. Whatever it is, it looks obscene.

JUDY. Everything looks obscene to you.

POLLY. Concentrate on *this* scene, will you, please?

GERTRUDE. Miss O'Connor?

HARRY (correcting GERTRUDE). *Ms.* O'Connor.

GERTRUDE. *Ms.* O'Connor?

HARRY. Don't you know nuttin'?

POLLY. Just for tonight, you may call me Polly.

HARRY. My mother had a bird named Polly.

POLLY (to GERTRUDE). What did you want to tell me?

HARRY. She choked on a cracker.

GERTRUDE. Your mother?

POLLY. There's no hurry.

HARRY. My mother choked on the bird.

POLLY. The play isn't until tomorrow night.

GERTRUDE. I never know when to believe him.

POLLY. I never know when to believe *you*.

GERTRUDE. Why me?

POLLY. I thought you had something to tell me.

GERTRUDE. I did. I do.

POLLY. Well?

GERTRUDE. You may not like this, Polly.

POLLY. Try me, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. How shall I say it?

POLLY. In the fewest possible words.

GERTRUDE (counting on her fingers). Five.

POLLY. Five what?

GERTRUDE. Words.

POLLY. Go ahead.

GERTRUDE. Six syllables.

POLLY. I believe you.

GERTRUDE. I have to leave early.

POLLY. Leave?

GERTRUDE. Early.

POLLY. Tell me she didn't say that.

HARRY. She did.

POLLY. How early?

GERTRUDE. Fifteen minutes.

LARRY. Nine hundred seconds.

GERTRUDE. Is it all right?

POLLY. Of course.

GERTRUDE. Don't you want to know why?

POLLY. No.

LES. I do.

POLLY. If she has to leave early, she has to leave early.

GERTRUDE. Exactly.

POLLY. It must be an emergency.

GERTRUDE. It is.

POLLY. You must have something you have to do.

GERTRUDE. I do.

POLLY. Some place you have to go.

GERTRUDE. I go. I mean, I do.

POLLY. Otherwise you would never ask to leave early tonight.

GERTRUDE. Tonight?

POLLY. Of all nights.

GERTRUDE. Not tonight.

POLLY. From a dress rehearsal . . . Did she say what I think she said?

HARRY. What do you think she said?

POLLY. Not tonight.

LARRY. That's what she said.



GERTRUDE. Tonight's no problem.

POLLY. No problem?

GERTRUDE. I can stay forever tonight.

POLLY. Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. Yes, Polly?

POLLY. I may call you Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. My mother does.

POLLY. That helps.

GERTRUDE. And when I'm at school, you're my mother.

POLLY. I am?

GERTRUDE. *In loco parenthesis.*

POLLY. I hope I'm worthy.

GERTRUDE. My father's a lawyer.

POLLY. I should have guessed.

GERTRUDE. Is it all right?

POLLY. If it's all right with your father.

GERTRUDE. I mean, what I asked you.

POLLY. You want to leave early?

GERTRUDE. I don't want to.

POLLY. I misunderstood.

GERTRUDE. I have to.

POLLY. But not tonight.

GERTRUDE. Tonight's no problem.

POLLY. Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. I can stay forever tonight.

POLLY. I hope you don't mind my asking.

GERTRUDE. I don't mind.

POLLY. That's very gracious of you.

GERTRUDE. My mother says I should be polite to everybody.

POLLY. She sounds like a nice lady.

GERTRUDE. She is.

POLLY. Gertrude, when do you want to leave early?

GERTRUDE. Two words. Four syllables.

POLLY. Get it over with.

GERTRUDE. Tomorrow night.

POLLY. Did she say —

HARRY (interrupting). Tomorrow night.

POLLY. I begin to grow weary of the world.

LARRY. Somebody get her a chair.

LES (calling off). Props.

HARRY (hunching his back). A chair, a chair, my *kingdome* for a chair.

JUDY. Here's one.

LES. Not that one.

POLLY. Thank you.

LARRY. Look out. (POLLY sits and the chair collapses.)

HARRY. You gave her the breakaway chair.

JUDY. Sorry.

POLLY (getting up). Me, too.

HARRY. As King Arthur said when the impostor came to Camelot . . .

LARRY. It's not my knight.

HARRY and LARRY. Yuk, yuk, yuk.

JUDY. Can we mend it?

LARRY. Of course, we can mend it. It's a breakaway chair. It's meant to break.

GERTRUDE. I'll fix it.

POLLY. Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. Yes, Polly?

POLLY. Put . . . the . . . chair . . . down.

GERTRUDE. Yes, Polly.

POLLY. Come here.

GERTRUDE. I am here.

POLLY. Tell me something. And go slow, because I don't always understand the first time.

GERTRUDE. What do you want to know? My mother says we

should never keep secrets.

POLLY. She sounds like a nice lady.

GERTRUDE. She is.

POLLY. Seven words. Ten syllables.

GERTRUDE. Don't keep me in suspense.

POLLY. How can you leave early tomorrow night?

GERTRUDE. Through the back door.

POLLY. Of the set?

GERTRUDE. Of the school.

POLLY. The back door?

GERTRUDE. My cousin is picking me up.

POLLY. Of the school.

GERTRUDE. To go to the wedding.

POLLY. Your cousin is getting married?

GERTRUDE. Her roommate.

POLLY. Your cousin's roommate is getting married.

GERTRUDE. My cousin is the bridesmaid.

POLLY. For her roommate?

GERTRUDE. For her roommate's bride.

POLLY. Your cousin's roommate is a man?

GERTRUDE. It's a big room.

POLLY. That helps.

GERTRUDE. Is it all right?

POLLY. If it's all right with your cousin.

GERTRUDE. Then I can go?

POLLY. Go?

GERTRUDE. To the wedding.

POLLY. Polly?

GERTRUDE. I'm Gertrude. You're Polly.

POLLY. I'm sorry, I'm not thinking straight.

GERTRUDE. Don't feel bad.

POLLY. I'll try not to.

GERTRUDE. My mother says we should never feel bad about our mistakes.

POLLY. She must be a nice lady.

GERTRUDE. She is. Besides, everybody does that.

POLLY. Does what?

GERTRUDE. Forget who they are.

POLLY. They do?

GERTRUDE. I do it all the time. But not in real life.

POLLY. Real life?

GERTRUDE. Just in the play. In the second half of the first act, when my husband comes in, I keep thinking he's my brother.

POLLY. Try to remember.

GERTRUDE. But my brother doesn't come in until the first half of the second act. The trouble is, the boy who plays my husband looks like my brother, in real life, and the boy who plays my brother reminds me of a kid I knew at camp, in real life. My mother says —

POLLY (interrupting). Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. Was I talking too much?

POLLY. You can't leave early tomorrow night.

GERTRUDE. I have it all worked out.

HARRY. Wait until you hear it.

LARRY. It's really neat.

POLLY. Neat?

GERTRUDE. You know how I get killed in the first half of the third act?

POLLY. I do.

GERTRUDE. And I fall down dead over here?

POLLY. Yes.

GERTRUDE. In front of the couch?

POLLY. Yes.

GERTRUDE. Now all I have to do is, when I die, I hit the deck.

POLLY. The deck?

GERTRUDE. And roll in back of the couch.

POLLY. Roll?

GERTRUDE. Like a barrel.

POLLY. A barrel?

GERTRUDE. Watch. (She hits the deck and rolls like a barrel out of sight behind the couch, then stands.) What do you think?

POLLY. Amazing.

GERTRUDE. He taught me how.

LARRY. All by myself.

POLLY. I'm impressed.

GERTRUDE. Here's the best part.

POLLY. What could be better than that?

GERTRUDE. Before I get killed, even before the third act starts, actually, during the intermission —

LARRY (interrupting). Wait until you hear this.

POLLY. I'm waiting.

GERTRUDE. Guess who's already behind the couch?

POLLY. Your cousin.

GERTRUDE. How could my cousin be there?

POLLY. Just a guess.

GERTRUDE. She'll be out in the car.

POLLY. If it's not your cousin, who could it be?

GERTRUDE (to LARRY). You tell her.

POLLY. Somebody tell me.

LARRY. Maggie.

POLLY. Maggie?

GERTRUDE. My understudy.

POLLY. I know who Maggie is.

GERTRUDE. When Larry stabs me —

POLLY (interrupting). Harry.

GERTRUDE. There I go again.

LARRY. I'm Larry.

GERTRUDE. I know.

LARRY. He's Harry.

HARRY. Hi.

GERTRUDE. When he stabs me . . .

POLLY. Shoots you.

GERTRUDE. Whatever.

POLLY. He stabs you in the first act.

GERTRUDE. I roll behind the couch.

POLLY. Like a barrel.

GERTRUDE. Watch. (She dies again, rolls behind the couch, then stands.) He wants to be sure I'm dead.

POLLY. He's not the only one.

GERTRUDE. So he comes after me. (She falls behind the couch.)

HARRY. Like this. (He leaps over the couch and drags Gertrude's lifeless body out front. Instead of GERTRUDE, the body is MAGGIE who was hidden behind the couch. GERTRUDE stands up behind the couch again.)

GERTRUDE. And he drags my lifeless body out front.

POLLY. Amazing.

GERTRUDE. But guess what?

POLLY. I can't.

GERTRUDE. It's not me he drags out.

POLLY. It's Maggie.

GERTRUDE. Right.

POLLY. Dressed like you.

GERTRUDE. And she'll be all curled up in a ball, like a ball. (MAGGIE curls up in a ball.)

LARRY. I taught her that.

GERTRUDE. Do you say "in a ball" or "like a ball?"

POLLY. Whatever.

LARRY. All by myself.

GERTRUDE. What do you think?

POLLY. Ingenious.

GERTRUDE (to the OTHERS). I knew she'd like it.

POLLY. Gertie?

GERTRUDE. Am I in trouble?

POLLY. Why do you ask?

GERTRUDE. Whenever you call me Gertie, I'm in trouble.

POLLY. I know I'm getting old.

GERTRUDE. You're young.

LARRY. And beautiful.

HARRY. Hubba, hubba, hubba.

GERTRUDE. You're so out of date.

HARRY. I like old movies.

POLLY. And I know that, as a person ages, the blood supply to the brain slows down, so you'll have to be patient with me when I ask you this. I don't mean to pry, but I'm curious. How . . . can . . . you . . . go . . . to . . . your . . . cousin's . . . wedding . . .

GERTRUDE. My cousin's roommate.

POLLY. I'm sorry.

GERTRUDE. That's all right.

POLLY. Do you forgive me?

GERTRUDE. There's nothing to forgive. My mother says —

POLLY (interrupting). Gert?

GERTRUDE. Now I *am* in trouble.

POLLY. How can you go to your cousin's wombmate's . . . (She corrects herself.) . . . *roommate's* wedding if you are lying behind a couch?

LARRY. Rolled up in a ball.

HARRY. Like a ball.

POLLY. In front of five hundred people, with a thousand eyeballs watching you.

HARRY. Nine hundred and ninety-nine.

POLLY. Did I miss something?

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