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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# Ashes, Ashes, *ALL FALL DOWN*

A Full-Length Play

By

JOSEPH ROBINETTE

Music and Lyrics

by

JOSEPH ROBINETTE

and

JAMES R. SHAW



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(ASHES, ASHES, ALL FALL DOWN)

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ASHES, ASHES, ALL FALL DOWN  
*A Full-Length Play with Music*  
For Six Men and Four Women

CHARACTERS

STEVE HERTZEL . . . . . a teacher  
ARTHUR WILCOX . . . . . a student  
SARA BLACKMORE-TOWNSEND . . . . . a reporter  
CARL BESTERFIELD . . . . . a detective  
GERRY |  
MARCI |  
JIMBO | . . . . . victims of a tragedy at a  
DEB | . . . . . rock concert  
TOM |  
ELLEN |

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: In and around a rock concert.

This play was written to be performed without intermission

## ASHES, ASHES, ALL FALL DOWN

THE SETTING: A series of levels will be used to depict the various scenes – interior and exterior – of the play. Specific locales include a teacher’s office, an office in an apartment, and a room in a boarding house. UC is a high platform.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: GERRY, MARCI, JIMBO, DEB and TOM are in silhouette across the DC area. They writhe as they chant.

ALL (chanting, starting slowly in a whisper, then building).  
One – two – three – four –  
Dammit, open up the door.  
One – two – three – four –  
Dammit, open up the door!  
One – two – three – four –  
Dammit, open up the door!  
ONE – TWO – THREE – FOUR –  
DAMMIT, OPEN UP THE DOOR!  
ONE – TWO – THREE – FOUR –  
DAMMIT, OPEN UP THE DOOR!

[Tape Cue 1.]

(ALL scream. The voices eventually give way to the sounds of sirens, and ALL fall lifeless to the floor. As the sirens fade, the lights begin to come up and the strong, steady beat of a

rock group, BLACK ORCHID, and its female lead singer are heard singing “Latch Key Kid.”)

(Detective CARL BESTERFIELD, in his sixties, and SARA BLACKMORE-TOWNSEND, a reporter about thirty years of age, enter and stare at the bodies which, one by one, get to their feet and give a wallet or other form of identification to CARL. SARA writes the names on a pad.)

GERRY. Girard Flemington – twenty-three – stockboy. (He exits.)

MARCI. Marsha Ann Gaylord – sixteen – student. (She exits.)

JIMBO. James Hendrickson – seventeen – student. (He exits.)

DEB. Debra Ebling – twenty-one – housewife. (She exits.)

TOM. Tom Morehouse – eighteen – student. (He exits.)

(CARL crosses to the somewhat shaken SARA and puts his arm around her. She summons her strength, smiles weakly at him, then exits. CARL surveys the general area momentarily, then starts to leave. ELLEN, previously unseen lying behind a platform, stands and goes to CARL, giving him her ID.)

ELLEN. Ellen Gaither – seventeen – dropout. (She exits as CARL watches her go. He then exits slowly as the music and lights fade.)

(The lights come up as STEVE HERTZEL, in his mid-thirties, enters his office. He is followed by ARTHUR WILCOX, a student.)

ART. I don't really want to talk to her.

STEVE. Why not?

ART. I didn't know Ellen all that well. Who is this reporter anyway?

STEVE (picking up a newspaper from the desk). Sara

Blackmore-Townsend. She seems to be the top reporter on the Orchid Tragedy.

ART. How did she connect me up with Ellen?

STEVE. I'm sure this is no cub reporter we're dealing with. Probably Vassar, journalism major, class of forty-two. Hey, there's a good opposite for you. Cubs.

ART. Cubs. Bears?

STEVE. Nope.

ART. Opposite of Cubs. It's gotta be some kind of animal.

STEVE. White Sox.

ART. Cubs – White Sox. (He moans as STEVE laughs.) All right, if you're gonna play *that* way. Here's one I've been saving up.

STEVE. I want you to go to class till the lady gets here.

ART. Just this one. Tree.

STEVE. Tree?

ART. Yeah – tree.

STEVE. Artie – there is no opposite of tree.

ART. Yes, there is.

STEVE. Tree. Root? Ground?

ART. Getting warmer.

STEVE. I give up.

ART. Don't give up.

STEVE. I just did. Is this an Artsie-Fartsie answer?

ART. No – it's legitimate. Hole.

STEVE. Hole is the opposite of tree?

ART. Sure. You tree a cat, and you hole a rabbit.

STEVE. That is a bona fide Artsie-Fartsie answer. (They laugh and pretend to spar.)

ART. Hey, are you coming over tonight?

STEVE. Maybe – but no Scrabble. I've got a backlog of papers.

ART. Can I grade the sophomore themes?

STEVE. If they're so bad *I* can't stand them. Now go. I'll call you when she gets here.

ART. History sucks. (He exits as STEVE laughs.)

[Tape Cue 2.]

(After a moment, STEVE goes to a small record player and turns it on. A reading from Shakespeare is heard. STEVE quickly rejects the record. A moment later the song “Video Games” by BLACK ORCHID comes on. STEVE sits, picks up a record jacket and looks at it as he listens with mild puzzlement. During the song SARA enters, followed by CARL. STEVE is unaware of their presence. SARA tries to get his attention over the music, then loudly calls his name.)

SARA. Mr. Hertz! (Startled, STEVE quickly turns off the record player.) Sorry. We didn’t mean to disturb you.

STEVE. It’s all right, I was already – disturbed. (He indicates the record player.)

SARA. I’m the reporter from the *Tribune*.

STEVE. Mrs. Blackmore-Townsend?

SARA (shaking his hand). Sara. Or Sally – as I’m known to some of my more intimate friends. (She indicates CARL.)

CARL. Carl Besterfield. (He and STEVE shake hands.)

STEVE. You’re a reporter, too?

CARL. I’m from the County Prosecutor’s Office.

STEVE. You must be a detective, Mr. Besterfield. The secretary didn’t tell me you –

SARA. Carl isn’t here on official business.

CARL. It’s my day off. I’m just making the rounds with Sally.

SARA. Carl and I go back to my “Crime-log” days with the paper.

CARL. Are you a Black Orchid fan, Steve?

STEVE. What? Oh. The record. No. I’m from the Peter, Paul and Mary generation. I’m attempting in vain to understand my students’ fascination with rock. But that’s okay. They don’t understand my fascination with Peter, Paul and Mary. (They laugh. STEVE motions for them to sit and they do so.) By the way, Mrs. . . . uh . . . Sara . . . I like your work.



SARA. Thanks. That's nice coming from an English teacher.

STEVE. I had you pegged a little older.

SARA. I'm twenty-nine, going on thirty-two.

STEVE. Vassar?

SARA. Iowa State.

STEVE. But you did major in Journalism.

SARA. Psychology.

STEVE. You people need another detective down there, Mr. Besterfield?

CARL. Call me Carl. I reckon we're in the same family since we're both fed by the taxpayers.

STEVE. Look, before I call Arthur down here, could you tell me what this is all about? I know it has something to do with the Gaither girl, but —

SARA. I'm doing an article on the victims. A profile, you might say. I'm trying to weave the individual stories into the last day they were alive. Starting when they first arrived until — the end.

CARL. Her editor says it's a natural for the wire services. He's already talking about the Pulitzer Prize.

SARA. Editors are always talking about the Pulitzer Prize. Even before the story is written. Like this one. Anyway, I'm talking with people who were with, or near, the victims Friday night.

STEVE. Artie wasn't there.

SARA. Are you sure?

CARL. Some of the kids we've talked to saw Ellen with a boy that night. Seems he was arguing with her — trying to pull her away from the crowd.

SARA. She wasn't found with the others, you know.

STEVE. But she was trampled, too, wasn't she?

SARA. Asphyxiated. It was a crush — not a rush — that killed them.

CARL. The description of the boy who was with her matches Arthur's.

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STEVE. It couldn't have been Artie. He was at home Friday night.

CARL. With his parents?

STEVE. They're divorced. His father's in Bermuda for a month. He travels a lot.

SARA. Arthur stays home by himself?

STEVE. A housekeeper comes in till five. And I look in on him occasionally.

SARA. Well, even if Arthur wasn't there, at least he may be able to give me some information on Ellen. A runaway. No family. No background. Nothing.

STEVE. How did you find out Artie knew her?

CARL. Her landlady and the manager where she worked described him. One of them knew his name was Art. But that was all.

SARA (producing a book). This is what led us here.

STEVE (opening the cover). His biology book.

SARA. He left it in her room.

STEVE. Well, let's hope he can shed some light for your sake – and the sake of the Pulitzer Prize Committee. (He picks up the phone and dials.) Joanne. Steve Hertz. Send Arthur Wilcox to my office, please. History, Palmer. What? . . . Oh, yeah. I just need to check it over and sign it. (He hangs up and pulls a sheet of paper from his desk.) The weekly report. I used to be late with this only once a month, but that's when it was the monthly report. (SARA laughs.) What else did you find in the girl's room?

CARL. The usual stuff. Just less of it. Mostly personal items. A few books and records.

SARA. But curiously nothing by Black Orchid. Supposedly she was a big fan of theirs.

CARL. Steve, you say you look in on Arthur occasionally. What about Friday?

STEVE. No, I don't think I saw him that night.

CARL. You seem to be quite close to the boy.

STEVE. I guess maybe he reminds me of me — when I was his age — sensitive, shy, smart — and a lousy student — except in English. He’s potentially a good writer — the way I was *before* the rejection slips. I guess you might say I’m Artie’s “Miss McIntire.”

SARA. Miss McIntire? One of your old school teachers?

STEVE (nodding). She gave me the attention I didn’t get at home. And *she* didn’t have a family. So — I guess we were good for each other.

CARL. You must like teaching.

STEVE. I do. But the word “teaching” implies that learning is going on — and it isn’t much any more. It gets harder and harder to keep up my perfect attendance record.

SARA. You haven’t missed a day this year?

STEVE. I haven’t missed a day in eleven years.

SARA. That’s phenomenal.

STEVE. That’s fear. I’m afraid if I miss one day, it’ll be easier the next — and so on till I’m calling in five, ten times a month.

SARA. Did you ever think about going back to your writing?

STEVE. I have an advanced case of mundo phobia — fear of the real world. But someday I might try a leave of absence and dust off the old typewriter.

SARA. Don’t wait too long. Before you know it, you’ll be two months from retirement — just like Carl.

(ART enters.)

STEVE. Artie. This is Mrs. Blackmore-Townsend and Mr. Besterfield. (They shake hands.)

SARA. Hi, Arthur.

ART (a bit nervous). I didn’t know there were going to be two reporters.

CARL. I . . . uh . . . work for the County. I’m just along for the ride.

SARA. Arthur, I'm trying to get a little information on — Ellen Gaither.

ART. I — I didn't know her very well.

SARA. Apparently nobody did. But you knew her well enough to visit with her — in her room.

ART. No. I walked home with her a few times, that's all. The landlady didn't allow any visiting. (CARL and STEVE exchange glances.)

CARL. What were you doing Friday night, son?

ART. Nothing. I was at home.

CARL. Did anybody see you there — or call you?

ART. Janine was there till five.

CARL. Janine?

ART. The housekeeper.

CARL. Oh, yeah. So you couldn't actually prove where you were after five o'clock Friday night?

STEVE. Why should he have to prove it?

CARL. He doesn't. I just wondered if he could.

STEVE. Well, as a matter of fact, he can. Art, Friday night was when we caught the James Dean double feature. Remember?

ART. Huh?

STEVE. Over at the college. Tatum Auditorium. "East of Eden" and "Rebel Without A Cause."

ART. Oh, yeah. Right.

STEVE. I kept thinking it was Saturday. But I believe it *was* Friday.

CARL (after a beat). Well, that settles that. Your witness, Sally.

SARA. This isn't a court, Arthur. And you're not on trial. So just relax. Now — When did you first meet Ellen?

ART. Last year — after school started.

SARA. *How* did you meet her? (ART looks to STEVE for guidance.)

STEVE. It's okay. Go ahead.

(The lights dim on the office and come up DL. ELLEN, dressed in a cowgirl outfit and carrying a shopping bag, enters and stands. ART leaves the office and goes to her.)

ELLEN. Are you staring at me?

ART. No – I mean – well – maybe a little.

ELLEN. Well, don't. Okay?

ART. I didn't mean anything by it. You just look – like my sister. That's all.

ELLEN. Well, I'm not.

ART. I know. (A pause.)

ELLEN. How long you been here?

ART. All my life. Well – actually I was born –

ELLEN. No – I mean *here* – waiting for the bus.

ART. Oh. Fifteen minutes, I guess.

ELLEN. Did two-twelve or fifty-seven come by?

ART. No. That's my bus line, too. (A pause. ELLEN laughs.)

ELLEN. "How long you been here?" "All my life." (They both laugh.)

ART. Well, how did I know you meant – ? (A pause, then both laugh again.) What's the record?

ELLEN (pulling an album from the bag). Orchid.

ART. They're good.

ELLEN. They're the best. This is their new one. I've been saving three weeks for this record. (A beat.)

ART. Where do you live?

ELLEN. Warwick.

ART. I'm on North Essex.

ELLEN. Where's that?

ART. About six blocks past Warwick.

ELLEN. Oh.

ART. You go to Harmon?

ELLEN (shaking her head). Uh-huh.

ART. Private school?

ELLEN. Yeah – private school. Right over there – The Burger

- Barn Academy for Girls. (They laugh.)
- ART. You work at Burger Barn?
- ELLEN. I'm not wearing this stupid cowgirl outfit to a Halloween party.
- ART. Boy – if I worked at a place like that, I'd eat all the time.
- ELLEN. They don't *give* you the food. I mean – you get a discount, but you gotta pay for it. I mean – Jesus Christ – we're too busy feeding everybody else to feed ourselves! (A pause.) Hey – I didn't mean to be snotty. I just wish the bus would get here so I can go home and listen to this album.
- ART. We could walk.
- ELLEN. Huh?
- ART. Save forty cents.
- ELLEN. It's gotta be over two miles.
- ART. We can talk. The time will go fast.
- ELLEN. It can't be much longer. (A pause.) Hey – that's weird.
- ART. What's weird?
- ELLEN. I just looked at you for the first time. I mean – really saw you, you know. You look like Dorcus' boy friend.
- ART. Dorcus' boy friend?
- ELLEN. Yeah, Dorcus – Black Orchid.
- ART. I know that. Who's her boy friend?
- ELLEN. Jamie Arsfeld. He's her road manager. Look. (She takes a clipping out of her wallet and shows it to him.)
- ART. You carry their pictures with you?
- ELLEN. See?
- ART. It's not real clear.
- ELLEN. Yeah. I cut it out of *Rolling Stone*. But I've got a poster of them – and you *do* look like him – maybe just a little shorter.
- ART. Okay – if you insist – I look like – who?
- ELLEN. Jamie – Jamie Arsfeld. (She laughs.) Hey.
- ART. Yeah?

ELLEN. Let's *do* walk.

ART. It's two miles.

ELLEN. I don't care.

ART. Okay.

(ART and ELLEN walk a few steps together, then he returns to the office and ELLEN exits as the lights cross-fade.)

SARA. Did she really look like your sister?

ART. Maybe — I don't know.

STEVE. When his parents divorced, she went with their mother. Artie stayed with his dad.

SARA. You never see your sister? (ART shakes his head.) So — Ellen *may* have looked like her. (ART nods his head.) What else can you tell me about Ellen?

ART. Not much. We talked about Orchid a lot. She was nice — a little moody, maybe. She kept to herself. I only saw her a few times. (A beat.) I guess I really oughtta be going back to class.

SARA. Sure. Maybe I could walk with you. You might think of something else. (To STEVE.) If he does remember anything later — anything at all — give me a call. Okay? (She gives a business card to STEVE.) This is my number at the newspaper. And I also have an office in my apartment. If you call after three, you'll probably get my highly-paid, loaded-with-fringe-benefits, six-year-old daughter

STEVE. She must belong to the teacher's union.

SARA. Carl — I'll meet you at the car.

CARL. Sure, Sal — be right out. (SARA and ART leave as CARL speaks to STEVE.) How were the movies? Friday night, I mean.

STEVE. Good. The way they always are. I've seen them ten — twelve times each. James Dean was my boyhood hero. We didn't have rock groups to worship back then. Just movie stars and ball players.

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