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A Play in a Prologue and Two Acts
by
WILFRID H. PETTITT

NINE GIRLS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(NINE GIRLS)

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NINE GIRLS

A Play in a Prologue and Two Acts

FOR AN ALL-WOMEN CAST

"Nine Girls" was first produced by A. H. Woods at the Longacre Theater, New York City, on January 13, 1943. The play was directed by Reginald Denham, with a setting by John Root. The cast was as follows:

JANE	Maxine Stuart
FREIDA	Ruth K. Hill
ALICE	Barbara Bel Geddes
EVE	K. T. Stevens
SHARON (<i>Glamorpuss</i>)	Mary McCormack
SHIRLEY	Marilyn Erskine
BETTY (<i>Tennessee</i>)	Kayo Copeland
STELLA (<i>Shotput</i>)	Irene Dailey
MARY	Adele Longmire
PHYLLIS	(See *Note)

PLACE: *The entire action is laid in the front room of a sorority clubhouse in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains.*

TIME: *The present, and three years ago.*

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE: *An evening in spring.*

*NOTE: If desired, the brief part of Phyllis in the Prologue may be played by Betty (Tennessee). This will keep the cast down to nine girls. Tennessee would be the logical

ACT ONE:

Scene One: A Saturday evening, three years earlier.

Scene Two: Late the same night.

ACT TWO:

Scene One: Sunday morning.

Scene Two: Sunday night.

person to double, since in the play proper she uses a Southern accent. As Phyllis, she would use a straight speaking voice. Her features are not clearly seen, for the Prologue is played in semi-darkness. A light coat thrown over her first act costume would further help to disguise her.

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

JANE: She is red-haired and lanky, and wears horn-rimmed glasses, which give her a studious look. She is regular and a good sport, an avid reader of mystery stories. In the Prologue she wears a sports coat over her first act costume. Throughout the rest of the play she wears comfortable, practical clothes suitable for a week-end in the mountains.

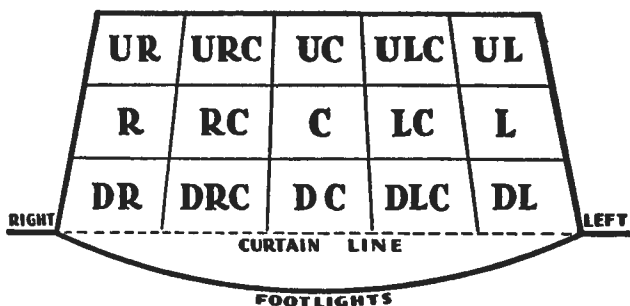
EVE: She is a blue-blood and a debutante, but there is nothing upstage or high hat about her. She is genuinely fond of Mary, and takes a special interest in her. Like Jane, she, too, wears good looking sports clothes suitable for a knock-about week-end.

FREIDA: She is bohemian in her appearance, and fancies herself as an intellectual. She is sympathetic to the left-wing cause, and doesn't care who knows it. The other girls kid her considerably, but she can give it back to them just as readily. Clothes don't mean much to Freida, and she dresses somewhat erratically.

ALICE: She is pretty, petite, and feminine, with none of the studied sophistication so characteristic of modern co-eds. She dresses simply, and with charm.

SHARON (*Glamorpuss*): Her nickname bespeaks her character. She is a dazzling blonde, with a sultry figure, and her carriage is stately, if self-consciously so. On her first entrance she wears a luxurious fur coat, which covers an ostentatious dress. Glamorpuss speaks with an accent which—she fondly hopes—is the finest Bostonian. Unfortunately, when she is “riled,” she often lapses from her accent. She fancies herself quite an actress. Throughout the play she wears a dramatic array of clothes—some of which are not practical for such a week-end.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS

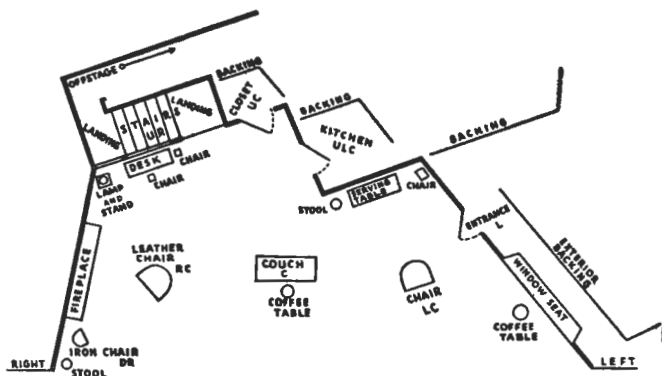


STAGE POSITIONS

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.

STAGE SET



The floor plan of the stage set for "Nine Girls," as produced at the Longacre Theatre, New York City. A simpler set will be just as effective.

Prologue

SCENE: *The front room of a sorority clubhouse in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. The room is large and quite typical. The walls may be of knotted pine and are decorated with Westlake College pennants, a football pom-pom, a photograph of a graduation class, and one or two deer's antlers. A staircase U R leads to the upstairs bedrooms. In the R wall is a large stone fireplace, the mantelpiece strewn with odds and ends which include a pair of ping-pong paddles—instruments of torture for recalcitrant pledges. Directly U C is a coat closet, and left of this a door opens into the kitchen. The main entrance to the cabin is at L stage. Below this door is a large window seat, equipped with a wall bracket lamp and adorned with brightly-colored curtains and cushions. The cabin furniture suggests that the various pieces have been donated at one time or another by the members of the sorority, for very little of it is new. It lacks for nothing, however, in comfort. A wrought-iron chair stands D L, below the fireplace. Set at an angle before the fire is a large leather armchair. Behind this, below the staircase, are a writing desk and chairs. Between the desk and the fireplace is a large table lamp, set upon a stand. Directly C stage is a Monterey type couch (backless, with a support for the back at one end only) or chaise longue, and at L C is another armchair. Upstage of the door L is a small serving table, with a small portable radio. On a shelf, between the serving table and the door to the kitchen, is an oil lamp. Right of the serving table is a stool, while left of it is a straight chair. There are two wicker coffee tables, one in front of the couch, the other in front of the window seat, and a stool below the iron chair D R.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *Little which has been described can be seen during the Prologue, as the stage remains throughout in semi-darkness and the larger pieces of furniture are covered with musty, wrinkled sheets. A faint shaft of light barely illuminates the stairway, and an atmosphere of eerie mustiness prevails. Somehow, the impression is created that the cabin has been unoccupied for some time. After a short pause we hear a car approaching in the distance. It draws up off L, and we hear next the slamming of car doors, footsteps in the gravel, and the fumbling of a key in the lock. JANE enters cautiously, L, followed by PHYLLIS. Their faces can not be discerned in the dim light. Outside, it is raining, a slow, steady rain.]*

JANE [*as she enters*]. The light switch won't work. They turned the power off a long time ago.

PHYLLIS. Whew! What a musty smell! Hadn't we better open one of the windows?

JANE. I'll light the oil lamp first. Just a second. It must still be where I left it.

[JANE goes to the oil lamp on the wall shelf. PHYLLIS crosses to the window seat.]

PHYLLIS. Hurry up! I'm getting the creeps.

JANE. That doesn't surprise me. [*She strikes a match.*] You know, I've never had the nerve to come up here by myself.

PHYLLIS. Why, Jane, I never took you for a nervous person.

JANE. I'm not—ordinarily. [*She lights the lamp and blows out the match.*]

PHYLLIS [*opening a window*]. There, that's better. Gosh, I've never seen so much dust.

JANE. Nobody's been here for three years.

PHYLLIS [*sitting at the window*]. Has the place been shut up all that time?

JANE. Yes. [*She glances about the room reminiscently as she*

moves down to the chair L. C.] I used to spend some marvelous week-ends in this cabin.

PHYLLIS. Jane, just what *is* this place? Who lived here?

JANE. Nobody. You see, it used to be a sorority clubhouse. It belonged to all of us.

PHYLLIS [*in surprise*]. You don't mean *our* sorority?

JANE [*nodding*]. Our sorority. [*She continues thoughtfully.*]

It seems strange to hear someone else say it now. I was a pop-eyed kid like you, and just your age, when I was pledged. When I said "our sorority" for the first time, I nearly snapped my coat buttons.

PHYLLIS. Gee, it's hard to think of you as a kid, Jane. You're—well, so grown up.

JANE. Am I? Well, yes, I suppose so. I graduated from medical school yesterday, so that makes me a woman of the world, doesn't it? [*She laughs shortly.*]

PHYLLIS. How does it feel?

JANE. To be grown up? [*She pauses a moment.*] It's hard to say, Phyllis. [*She sits on the left arm of the chair L. C.*]

One day you're a youngster and the next a woman. At least, that's the way it seemed to happen in my case.

PHYLLIS. You mean something happens to you overnight?

JANE [*grimly*]. Yes. Something happens to you—overnight. . . .

PHYLLIS [*looking about the room*]. There's something awfully queer about all this. I don't get it.

JANE. What?

PHYLLIS. It's beautiful up here. I've never seen anything like that gorgeous view of the valley. [*She glances out the window.*] If this cabin were cleaned up it would be a marvelous place for parties and things. Yet, you say none of the girls ever come up here any more.

JANE. Yes. I've always thought it was darned foolish waste. There's no sense in letting the place rot to pieces like this.

PHYLLIS [*after a short pause*]. Tell me, Jane—why did you bring me up here?

JANE. Well, I've been thinking about it for a long time. There's a brand new crop of kids at the college now. All the old ones have graduated. I thought if I got you interested in the place you'd talk to the other freshmen about it and maybe take it over. Maybe you could bring the good old days back again.

PHYLLIS [*puzzled*]. I'm still in the dark, Jane.

JANE [*uncomfortably*]. How do you mean?

PHYLLIS. I'd like to know what happened. Why the place has been shut up for three years. Why you and your friends stopped coming.

JANE. I knew you'd ask that. [*She rises and walks upstage, agitated.*] It doesn't really matter, does it?

PHYLLIS. No, but I'm terribly curious.

JANE. It's too long a story. It'll have to keep for a rainy day.

PHYLLIS [*glancing through the window, speaking pointedly*]. It's raining.

JANE. Yes. [*She walks back to the chair L C, trying to cover up her growing nervousness.*] It rained that night, too. Cats and dogs. [*She speaks with savage suddenness.*] Oh, why did I let myself think about it?

PHYLLIS. What night?

JANE. Look, kid, just forget I said that. I'm just a rotten saleswoman, that's all.

PHYLLIS. You don't have to sell me on this place, Jane. I think it's terrific.

JANE. Well, that's a help.

PHYLLIS [*walking toward the fireplace, inspecting the darkened room as she goes*]. When the other pledges hear about it the Marines won't be able to keep them away. [*She trips over something in the dark, D R C.*] Ouch!

JANE. Stub your toe?

PHYLLIS. Yes. What on earth is this on the floor? [*She bends down and picks it up.*] Huh! A poker!

JANE [*sharply*]. Is it? [*She walks to the window seat.*]

PHYLLIS. What's wrong, Jane?

JANE [*testily*]. Put it down, will you?

PHYLLIS [*putting the poker down by the fireplace*]. All right.

Why are you so jumpy all of a sudden?

JANE. Don't pay any attention to me. It just occurred to me that schoolgirl memories aren't always pleasant.

PHYLLIS [*moving U R C*]. What a darling desk!

JANE. I used to do a lot of studying there. Wrote my first thesis on it.

PHYLLIS. Somebody left a book here. [*She takes the book from the desk, blows off the dust, and opens it.*] Why, it belongs to you, Jane. Your name's on the flyleaf.

JANE. I'd forgotten . . .

PHYLLIS [*putting the book down*]. That's the kitchen, isn't it? [*She walks toward the kitchen door, and stops in front of the closet door U C.*] And that's a closet, I suppose?

[*As PHYLLIS puts her hand on the latch, JANE's nerves snap and she shouts suddenly.*]

JANE. No, Phyllis, no! Keep away from there!

[*PHYLLIS springs away, startled.*]

JANE. Don't . . . don't go near it! . . .

PHYLLIS [*astonished*]. Jane, what in the world—

JANE. Sorry, youngster. I've been a fool. I shouldn't have brought you here. [*She moves toward the door L.*] Come on; I think it's about time we started home.

PHYLLIS [*coming down to the chair L C*]. But we've only just come.

JANE. I should have known better. You can't take up from where we left off. Nobody can. This place is dead. It died three years ago. And you can't bring the dead to life. [*She moves as if to open the door.*]

PHYLLIS. Jane, wait a second.

[*JANE pauses.*]

PHYLLIS. What was it that happened here?

[JANE *does not answer.*]

PHYLLIS. It—it was something . . . horrible, wasn't it?

JANE [*hesitating*]. Yes.

PHYLLIS [*insistently*]. So horrible that you've shunned this cabin ever since. You and the others have kept away because you knew it could never be the same happy place again.

[JANE *turns and walks slowly back to the window seat.*]

JANE. Well, you guessed it. [*She sits down, staring moodily out the window.*] The best thing that could happen would be that it burned to the ground.

PHYLLIS. How is it that nobody seems to have heard—

JANE. They hushed it up. The college saw to that. And it was just as well. . . .

PHYLLIS [*sitting in the chair L C*]. Tell me. Please.

JANE. All right. But I warn you, it's pretty hard to believe. You'll say things of that sort don't happen to people like us. But they can. And they do. [*She continues, reflectively.*] Yes, they're the kind of things that make people grow up, Phyllis—overnight. . . .

[*The wind rises as JANE continues, and the lights slowly begin to dim out.*]

JANE. It was a Saturday night, three years ago last spring. Four of us had come up the night before. We were waiting dinner for some other girls, who were due to arrive at any moment. That night we had the grandfather of all mountain storms . . .

[*During the darkness the wind rises to a fitful crescendo, and thunder is heard in the distance. After a short pause we hear piano swing music over the radio.*]

END OF PROLOGUE

Act One

SCENE I

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is a Saturday evening in spring, three years earlier. As the lights rise again the music on the radio is increased in volume. The sheets have been removed from the furniture, and the scene is a cheerful and complete contrast to the bleak atmosphere of the Prologue. All the lamps are lighted, and the cabin looks definitely "lived in." The furniture is arranged exactly as we last saw it. The energetic rattle of dishes is heard from the kitchen, off U L C. JANE is stretched out on the chaise longue, or couch, reading a book; and now that we see her clearly for the first time we discover that she is red-haired and lanky. The horn-rimmed glasses she wears give her a studious look. After a brief pause, EVE appears at the kitchen door. She is a blue-blood and a debutante, but at the moment no one would know it. There is a smudge on her nose, and she holds a saucepan in one hand and a butcher knife in the other.]*

EVE. Jane, come and help me with the roast, will you?

JANE [*yawning*]. Right.

[*JANE stretches, rises lazily, and follows EVE into the kitchen, closing the door behind her. The music on the radio continues for a moment or two, and then fades down. The announcer speaks in a tone of urgency.*]

ANNOUNCER. We interrupt this broadcast at the request of the police department to bring you the following special bulletin: The dead body of Miss Paula Canfield, missing student at Westlake University and daughter of the multi-millionaire Harold Canfield, has been found in the Arroyo

Seco near the Colorado Street bidge. Miss Paula Canfield is apparently the victim of a brutal murderer. Her face and head have been mutilated almost beyond recognition. Sergeant Kennedy of the homicide detail has taken Mrs. Canfield to the morgue for official identification of her daughter's body. The police are actively engaged in the case. . . . We now resume our regular dinner hour broadcast.

[*The swing music begins again, an ironic postlude to the announcer's tale of tragedy. A few moments later the kitchen door opens and JANE enters, executing an impromptu dance step as she returns to the couch.*]

JANE [*calling over her shoulder*]. Hurry up with those snacks, Freida.

FREIDA [*off U L C*]. Stop rushing me.

[*FREIDA enters from the kitchen with a tray of tiny sandwiches or crackers spread with cheese. She is bohemian in her appearance, fancies herself as an intellectual, is sympathetic to the left-wing cause, and doesn't care who knows it. Flashing a look of scorn at the dancing JANE, she crosses to the serving table and turns off the radio.*]

JANE [*flopping down on the couch*]. This book's awfully obvious. I knew all along it was the maid who rubbed out old man Murgatroyd.

FREIDA. Why did you have to tell me, Jane? Now there's no point to my reading it.

JANE. Stop beefing and dish out the eats. I have another hoodnuit in my room.

[*ALICE comes downstairs, picks up a script board and pen from the desk, and goes to the leather armchair before the fire. She is pretty, petite, and feminine, with none of the studied sophistication so characteristic of modern co-eds.*]

FREIDA. How about you, Alice? [*She holds out the tray.*]

ALICE [*busy writing*]. No, thanks.

[FREIDA *crosses to JANE, stands behind the couch, and holds out the tray with one hand.*]

FREIDA. Here you are. [*She picks up JANE'S book with her free hand and glances at the cover.*] What was the maid's motive?

JANE [*helping herself from the tray*]. Well, it's rather involved. It seems that old man Murgatroyd had cheated her twenty years before.

FREIDA. Did it take her *that long* to get mad at him? [*She crosses to the desk with the book and lays it down with the tray.*]

JANE. Don't ask me. [*She rises and saunters to the armchair L C, looking toward the window and nibbling on a cracker.*] Say, it's getting dark. Those kids are late.

FREIDA. They'd better step on it. There's a storm brewing.

JANE. Freida, this is California. You mean a light mist.

FREIDA [*crossing in front of the couch*]. Real estate propaganda. Whatever it is, they'd better not get caught in it. One of those light mists washed out a steel bridge last year.

JANE. Well, Freida—[*She crosses to the serving table, picks up a coke bottle, and flourishes it.*] To the Masses. Down with Special Privilege.

FREIDA. You guys are determined to make a revolutionary out of me. Okay; have it your own way. I wear whiskers and throw bombs.

[*As JANE returns to the chair L C, EVE reappears from the kitchen, crossing D R C.*]

EVE. I've forgotten. How many of us are there?

JANE [*sitting in the chair L C*]. Let's see. [*She counts on her fingers.*] Four of us here. Four more seniors and two pledges . . .

FREIDA. Ten.

EVE. Confound it, if they don't come soon the roast will be cold.

[EVE goes out U L C again.]

FREIDA. I don't see why they couldn't have come up with us last night.

JANE. Shotgun has a track meet, and Sharon is rehearsing "Macbeth."

[A car is heard approaching off L. EVE pops her head around the kitchen door.]

EVE. Here they come, Freida. They'll be hungry. Have you made enough for them to nibble on before dinner?

FREIDA. A truckload.

[EVE disappears off U L C again. FREIDA goes to the desk, picks up the tray, and crosses with it to the serving table.]

ALICE. Jane, come here, will you? I'm all tied up in knots.

[JANE crosses to ALICE.]

ALICE. You medical students are good at trig. How do you figure Sine A on this problem?

JANE [standing behind the chair, looking at the script board over ALICE's shoulder]. Dope! Look what you're doing. AB equals XY , doesn't it?

ALICE. Yes, but—

JANE. Well, then, XY equals 3.170. Look at your table.

ALICE. Oh, I get it! Why was I born a lady? I'm so darned dumb!

JANE. You'll never make the exams at that rate, baby. Better prepare your old man for the worst.

[The car draws up off L with a squealing of brakes. We hear a great deal of chattering off L, accented by the vigorous slamming of car doors. FREIDA opens the door L and looks out.]

FREIDA [*to ALICE and JANE*]. Oh—oh! It's Sarah Bernhardt and the Sweet Young Things. Hold your hats, here we go! [*She sits on the high stool right of the serving table, arms folded in pained resignation.*]

[*The next six speeches are heard off L, en masse.*]

SHIRLEY. Gee!

TENNESSEE. Gosh!

SHIRLEY. A real sorority clubhouse.

TENNESSEE. And we made it!

SHIRLEY. We're in!

TENNESSEE. Just wait till Nashville High hears about this!

[SHARON, *otherwise known as "Glamorpuss," enters languidly. Her nickname bespeaks her character. She is a dazzling blonde, with a sultry figure, and her carriage is stately, if self-consciously so. She wears a luxurious fur coat, which covers an ostentatious dress, and she speaks with an accent which—she fondly believes—is the finest Bostonian. She is followed by the two "pledges," who enter carrying their suitcases. BETTY, nicknamed "Tennessee" because of her marked Southern accent, wears a little-girl dress which accentuates her tender years. SHIRLEY is correspondingly cute, with big round eyes and an energy that is apparently inexhaustible. She puts one suitcase behind the armchair L C and goes with TENNESSEE to the window seat. SHARON moves U C as she greets the other girls.*]

SHARON. Hello, Jane deah, how are you? [*She puts her coat over the bannister.*] Alice, you look just too sweet in that rustic setting. [*She eyes FREIDA coldly.*] How are you, Freida?

FREIDA. Please don't be so cordial, dear. I wouldn't mind cutting your throat, either.

SHARON [*ignoring her magnificently, walking around the left end of the couch*]. You've all met the youngsters, haven't you? Aren't they cute?