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*Dramatic Publishing*

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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# The \$39 Man

BY  
WILLIAM GLEASON



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE THIRTY-NINE DOLLAR MAN)

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THE THIRTY-NINE DOLLAR MAN  
*A Play in One Act*  
For Seven Men and Four Women

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C H A R A C T E R S

NARRATOR

MILO SAPPERSTEIN . . . . . *the hero*

NATALIE . . . . . *his fiancée*

PADDY . . . . . *his friend*

DR. DRAINO . . . . . *the villain*

DENISE DARNELL . . . . . *a doctor*

HERCULES

GENERAL CUSTER

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

TARZAN and JANE

. . . . . *heroes*

PLACE:     *Here and there in a large American city.*

TIME:       *The present.*

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# The \$39 Man

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PATRIOTIC MUSIC FADES IN to a low level and continues throughout the prologue. A light comes up C to reveal the NARRATOR, who stands on an elevation before the curtain. Behind the NARRATOR is a large gold star on which are written the names of various heroes in fact and fiction. There is a large empty space in the star, reserved for Milo. As the light comes up, the NARRATOR addresses the audience.)

NARRATOR. Hero! (Spells it.) H-E-R-O.

A: A mythological or legendary figure, often of divine descent, endowed with great strength or ability. A case in point: Hercules!

(Stage lights come up. HERCULES enters L wearing an animal skin. He strikes a pose.)

NARRATOR. Hercules was the greatest hero of Greece, the strongest man in the world. Among other things, he killed the massive lion of Nemea with his bare hands. (A stuffed toy lion is handed to HERCULES from offstage. He growls and strangles the stuffed lion, finally throws it to the floor and kicks it offstage.) He fought and killed the terrible nine-headed Hydra of Lerna with nothing but a sword. (HERCULES is handed a sword from offstage and begins to swing at nine imaginary heads. Each time he swings he says "gotcha." He stops at seven.) Who killed

the nine-headed Hydra. (HERCULES shrugs and chops off two more heads with two more "gotchas," then hands the sword offstage.) Hercules, who single-handedly cleaned the filthy Augean stables in one day. (HERCULES is handed a shovel from offstage and begins to work.) Now this was no easy task, since the Augean stables held thousands of cattle and had not been cleaned for years. But, as we all know, Hercules was no ordinary man. When he had finished cleaning the stables, he uttered the words remembered to this day in story and song . . .

HERCULES. This place stinks. (He exits.)

NARRATOR. . . . thus reserving his place in history. Hero! H-E-R-O. B: An illustrious warrior. A case in point: General George Armstrong Custer of the Seventh Cavalry. History will never forget what General Custer said to his men as he approached his date with destiny at the Little Big Horn.

(CUSTER rides out L toward R on a broomstick horse.)

CUSTER. Will you stop complaining. I tell you, I know what I'm doing. (He exits.)

NARRATOR. Hero! H-E-R-O. C: A man admired for his achievements or qualities. A case in point: Alexander Graham Bell.

(BELL enters L carrying a small table on which there is a telephone. He places the table on the floor and then stares expectantly at the telephone.)

NARRATOR. After many unsuccessful attempts to achieve voice transmission over great distances, Mr. Bell finally achieved success when . . .

(The telephone rings.)

BELL. It's ringing! (Telephone rings again.) Can it be! (He reaches out and picks up the telephone.) Hello? (He suddenly frowns and looks offstage.) It's for you.

(CUSTER enters L. He has numerous arrows protruding from the front and back of his jacket. He speaks into the telephone.)

CUSTER. Yes? I know that's what I said. Look, everybody's entitled to one mistake. (CUSTER and BELL exit, taking table and telephone with them.)

NARRATOR. Hero! H-E-R-O. D: The principal male character in a literary or dramatic work. A case in point: Tarzan of the apes. The famous yet ferocious denizen of deepest Africa, who was known and feared by all who heard his noble cry.

(We hear the offstage cry of TARZAN. As he enters L, we see he is howling because he is stepping on thorns and is walking gingerly. As he gets onstage, he sits and begins pulling the thorns out of his feet.)

NARRATOR. This valiant and mighty warrior, who feared nothing, was tamed only by the love of a woman . . . Jane.

(JANE enters L wearing jungle garb and high-top tennis shoes.)

JANE. Hello, darling.

TARZAN. Me hurt foot.

JANE. I love the jungle. In all its verdant splendor,

I find the key to inner peace and harmony.

TARZAN. Me hurt both foot. (JANE sits next to TARZAN and leans against him. He begins to pick through her hair.)

JANE (sighing deeply). A banana for your thoughts.

TARZAN (leaning close to her). Tambawa . . . pesi-pesi . . . umwebe kani dani?

JANE. Very well, dear. (She rises and he follows.) Just this once. But next time . . . (He jumps on her back as she walks off.) . . . you must remember to wear your sneakers.

TARZAN (laughing dumbly). Home, Jane. (TARZAN and JANE exit.)

NARRATOR. Hero! H-E-R-O. E: The central figure in an event or period. A case in point: Milo Sapperstein, skin-diving trouble-shooter for Moto-Rooter.

(MILO enters L wearing his skin-diving equipment and "swims" across the stage.)

NARRATOR. From his rather inauspicious beginning as a plumber's helper, Milo Sapperstein, boy wonder, through hard work, dedication and determination has grown to become the foremost guardian of the city sewage system. This is Milo's story -- an inspirational, thought-provoking and often awe-inspiring story that takes Milo out of the depths of the sewer right into your hearts. You've heard of Superman, Batman, Aquaman and Spiderman. You've heard of Mandrake the Magician, A Man For All Seasons, the Manchurian Candidate and the Six Million Dollar Man. Now you will see the story of another man. A man whose exploits place him on the honored rolls of the immortal heroes of past, present and future. This is your life, Milo Sapperstein . . .



your story. This is the story of . . . (He writes in the blank space in the star as he says:) . . . The Thirty-Nine Dollar Man! Our story begins in the bowels of a great metropolitan city . . . at manhole number 414, directly over the main sewage junction. Little does Milo know what awaits him beneath the city streets, nor does he suspect the curious twist of fate that will make Milo Sapperstein . . . The Thirty-Nine Dollar Man.

LIGHTS OUT

(NARRATOR exits while stage area is dark.)

# The \$39 Man

SCENE: A street in a deserted part of the city; city noises can be heard. Some old buildings are indicated in the background and there is a roped area DC. Two signs, "Danger - Men Working," are posted. Directly DC, just at the edge of the stage, is a long tubular manhole that descends into the orchestra pit [or trap door]. UC is the Moto-Rooter machine, covered with various dials and switches. A hose runs from the machine. At the end of the hose is a large metal blade. A sign on the machine reads, "Moto-Rooter -- when it comes to sewage, we're at your disposal." A radio and a tool box are also onstage.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: MILO enters from L, followed by his fiancée, NATALIE, and his older friend and assistant, PADDY O'BRIEN. PADDY speaks with a thick Irish brogue. MILO wears his wet suit and tank. His mask is on top of his head and he carries a six-foot toiler plunger. PADDY and NATALIE seem concerned about Milo's welfare.)

NATALIE (holding Milo's arm). I won't let you go down there, Milo. If you love me, you won't go.

MILO. Don't make it hard for me, Natalie.

PADDY. Now listen to reason, Milo, me boy. Are ya' forgettin' what Mr. Dundee . . . (Hand on

heart.) . . . God rest his befuddled soul . . .  
said when he offered you the job as a trouble-  
shooter ?

MILO. Mr. Dundee said a lot of things, Paddy.

PADDY. Don't you remember what he said about  
the sewage business ?

MILO. Yes, I do. He said, "The pay is good. It's  
never boring . . . and it doesn't take long for a  
man to work his way to the bottom. "

PADDY. He also said, "Don't get in over your head. "

NATALIE. "Don't take unnecessary chances. "

PADDY. And as sure as my name is Paddy Daniel  
Patrick Moynihan O'Brien, there's somethin'  
about this job that don't smell right.

MILO. In this business, no job smells right. I'm  
going down . . . and that's that.

NATALIE. I still think you're taking an unnecessary  
chance.

MILO. Confucius say, "Man who never take  
unnecessary chances, never see light at the end  
of the sewer. "

NATALIE. Natalie say, "Fiance who die in sewer  
make lousy husband. " Oh, Milo! I wish you'd  
stop being so stubborn. I won't let you go down  
there!

PADDY. Nor will I, by Dublin, or my name ain't  
Paddy Patrick Daniel O'Toole . . .

MILO. Come on, you two! What would life be like  
if people never took chances? What if the  
Wright brothers never took a chance? We'd all  
be flying around in cars instead of airplanes.  
Did you ever consider that ?

PADDY. And what if Dr. Draino has planned this  
as a trap like the last job? Did you ever  
consider that ?

NATALIE. You know Dr. Draino won't quit until  
you're dead . . . or worse.

MILO. Dr. Draino hasn't got all the aces in the deck. I've got some cards up my sleeve and I can play my hand as well as anybody.

NATALIE. What hand is that, Milo?

MILO. When you work in the sewer, there's only one hand to play, Natalie. . . . A Royal Flush.

PADDY. But Dr. Draino . . .

MILO. Paddy! . . . Do I look stupid to you? . . . Well, do I? I want you two to understand something. I've spent more time in the sewer than most politicians! I know what I'm doing. Dr. Draino can't put anything over on me. I can see through any trap he might set up and avoid it. He's a blundering common criminal while I am a veteran tactician with many tricks up my sleeve.

(DR. DRAINO enters R. He wears an eye patch, speaks in a gruff voice and has the typical villain's mustache. He is faintly disguised as an elderly woman, wearing a shabby gray wig and a long dress with his trousers extending out from under it. He also uses a cane to add to his disguise. He pauses at his entrance.)

DRAINO. Well, well, well. It looks like the fish have taken the perennial bait. Now to put my plan into action. It won't be long and Milo, the mindless manhole miner, will be up to his ears in it and the fair young Natalie will be in my clutches! Hardee-har-har! (Attempts to change his voice. To MILO.) Help an old lady across the street, sonny?

MILO (looking up). Forsooth!

PADDY (rather taken aback at the old lady's appearance). Saints preserve us! I've seen a better-lookin' face on a rabid monkey.