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Dramatic Publishing

THE EIGHTH ORDER

A Play in Two Acts

by

NANCY KIEFER



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(THE EIGHTH ORDER)

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According to Catholic theology there exist nine choirs or orders of angels. They are:

1. Seraphim
2. Cherubim
3. Thrones
4. Dominations
5. Virtues
6. Powers
7. Principalities
8. Archangels
9. Angels

The Eighth Order, or Archangels, are sent to earth by God as messengers to men. St. Michael, St. Gabriel and St. Raphael are the three Archangels mentioned in Holy Scripture.

The World Premiere of *THE EIGHTH ORDER* was held at Marinello Little Theatre, John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, June 1991, with the following:

Director Karen Gygli
Set and Lighting Design James F. Beck
Asst. Director/Stage Manager Mary Katherine Thomas

Charlotte Steele Victoria Karnafel Glivar
Cliff Foley Thom Bowers
Philip Steele Tim Keo
Pauline Steele Lisa J. Eckley
Margaret Gardner Meg McGarry
Clara Hamlin Nancy Shimonek

SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene One: Friday afternoon

Scene Two: Later that night

Scene Three: Saturday morning

ACT TWO

Scene One: Later that night

Scene Two: Sunday morning

Scene Three: A week later

Scene Four: Two days later

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *The home of the Steele family.*

AT RISE: *CLIFF enters the kitchen carrying a withered funeral arrangement.*

CLIFF. Pauline, you here?

PAULINE (*from upstairs*). That you, Cliff?

CLIFF. It ain't nobody else. Come on down and give me a kiss!

PAULINE. I ain't dressed!

CLIFF. All the more reason to come on down and give me a kiss!

PAULINE (*laughs*). You're a wicked man, Cliff.

(PAULINE enters wearing a bathrobe.)

PAULINE. You brung me flowers!

CLIFF (*embraces her; hands her the flowers*). Don't I always? (*Smells her neck.*) You smell real good, Pauline.

PAULINE. That there's "Evenin' in Paris." Ain't it nice? Came in the prettiest blue bottle you ever seen.

CLIFF. You better watch who you wear that around, little girl. That there scent'll drive men wild! (*Pretends to attack her.*)

PAULINE (*pulls away*). Stop it! My ma or Phil might walk in.

CLIFF. So what? They know we're engaged. Since when can't an engaged man give his fiancée a kiss?

PAULINE. Since my ma don't accept our engagement no more than the man in the moon. You know that, Cliff.

CLIFF. It ain't none a' her business who you marry. (*Grabs her; she sits on his lap; he kisses her neck.*) When's that old witch gettin' home?

PAULINE. Soon, so don't be gettin' no ideas.

CLIFF. I always get ideas when I got you on my lap, sweetie. When you gonna marry me? I'm already an old man, Pauline. Gonna be forty-five next month. I can't wait forever.

PAULINE. I'll marry ya when I'm good and ready.

CLIFF. What kind of an answer is that?

PAULINE (*pulls away*). I got to go to work. Will ya walk me into town, Cliff?

CLIFF. I'll do better than that. I'll drive ya. I got the hearse outside.

PAULINE (*laughs*). Sally says she don't want you bringin' me to work in that hearse no more. Says it's bad for business for folks to see a hearse sittin' outside a beauty parlor.

CLIFF. So I'll drop ya off in the alley and pick ya up at six. We'll drive over to East Union, get us a motel room, and I'll have ya home by eleven.

PAULINE. You got a one-track mind, Cliff. Let me get dressed. (*Exits.*)

(*CLIFF turns on the radio, sits down, lights a cigarette, pulls a bottle of liquor out of his jacket and drinks; enter PHILIP.*)

CLIFF. Well, hiya there, boy.

PHILIP. ...hiya, Cliff.

CLIFF. How's the flower growin' business today?

PHILIP. Oh, I wasn't workin'. I was takin' a walk and stopped over at Mrs. Hamlin's. (*Sees the funeral flowers; touches them and smiles.*) These look like our daisies.

CLIFF (*laughs*). Now, how the hell can you tell your daisies from the next guy's?

PHILIP. You can...when you grow 'em. These from the Porter funeral?

CLIFF. Yep. It's about time that old coot died. He was ninety-nine years old and meaner than shit. Should'a died twenty years ago.

PHILIP. Bible says there's a right time to be born and a right time to die, Cliff. He died when he was supposed to.

CLIFF (*stands*). Now don't start spoutin' the Bible at me. Diggin' graves for a livin' and hangin' around funerals, I get my fill a' the Bible. I'd be a rich man if I had a dollar for every time I had to listen to that twenty-third psalm.

PHILIP. Don't ya like the twenty-third psalm?

CLIFF. Well, sure I do, but I'm sick and tired of hearin' it. You know, I probably got that thing memorized. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the...beside the...

PHILIP. The still water.

CLIFF. Yeah, that's right. He leadeth me beside the still water. He restoreth my heart.

PHILIP. My soul. He restoreth my soul.

CLIFF. Whatever. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness and into the valley of the shadow of death.

PHILIP. No, Cliff. That ain't how it goes. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear

no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

CLIFF (*laughs; cuts him off*). Aw, it wouldn't be right me knowin' a prayer by heart. I ain't the prayin' type. But you...now, you're somethin' different. You know the Bible like the back a' your hand, don't ya, Phil?

PHILIP. I like readin' it.

CLIFF. Now, I ain't sayin' there's anything wrong with the Bible. They don't call it the Good Book for nothin', but you can carry a good thing too far, ya know. I'll tell ya what your problem is, boy. You ain't got no social life, that's what. You're a nice lookin' young fella and you need to get out more.

PHILIP (*embarrassed*). ...I'm real shy around women, Cliff. You know that.

CLIFF. I know some women over in East Union who'll get you over your shyness *real* fast.

PHILIP (*shakes his head*). I don't think so.

CLIFF. Nice lookin' girls. You like blondes?

PHILIP. ...I don't know.

CLIFF. You like redheads?

PHILIP. ...I...I don't think about things like that.

CLIFF. Well, you better start thinkin' about things like that, Phil. Now, I want you to decide if you wanna go dancin' with a blonde, a redhead or a brunette. Blonde's name is Shirley. She's built, if ya know what I mean. Redhead's name is Ginger. She's skinny as a rail, but some men like 'em that way. And the brunette's Janie. She's the prettiest of the three. Kinda quiet. I think you'd like her the best. You just let me know which one ya want, and I'll take care a' the rest.

PHILIP. Cliff, I can't dance.

CLIFF. Any fool can dance. Your sister can teach ya.

PHILIP. And...I don't want to go out. Thanks for askin', but I ain't interested.

CLIFF. What about you and that Hamlin woman? She ain't too bad. A bath and a decent set a' clothes and who knows what she might look like.

PHILIP. I go past the Hamlin's when I'm out walkin'. I visit the boys.

CLIFF. How many boys that woman got now?

PHILIP. Five.

CLIFF (*laughs*). I seen them in town the other day and, I swear, each one a' them boys looks like he got a different father. That woman ever been married?

PHILIP (*annoyed*). I don't know, and I don't care. I stop by and visit the boys. That's all.

CLIFF. Well, if kid number six looks anything like you, Phil, I'll know you was doin' more up there than *visitin' the boys*.

(*PAULINE enters.*)

PAULINE. Phil, you home! (*Gives him a hug.*) Where were ya?

PHILIP. Just takin' a walk.

CLIFF. You walk too much, boy. All that exercise ain't good for ya. You know George Adler? He used to take long walks. He said it was beneficial to your heart. (*Laughs.*) Well, about thirty years ago on one a' them *beneficial* walks his heart gave out on 'im and my pa found 'im layin' on Route 2, almost dead. He ain't taken a walk since. Took up drinkin' whiskey and smokin' Lucky Strikes instead. He is now seventy-five years old and the picture a' health.

PAULINE. He don't look like no picture a' health to me.

CLIFF. That walkin' ll kill ya, boy. (*To PAULINE.*) Hey, I was tryin' to talk your brother here into goin' to East Union with us, Pauline. You know Janie and Ginger, don't ya?

PAULINE (*laughs*). Them bar maids? They ain't Phil's type, you old fool.

CLIFF. Yeah, I reckon you're right. They don't read the Bible enough for Phil here.

PHILIP. I told you. I ain't interested, Cliff. And I don't wanna talk about it no more.

CLIFF. Just lookin' out for ya, boy. You *are* gonna be my brother-in-law someday soon, I hope, so I need to look out for ya.

PAULINE. Come on, Cliff. Take me to work before Ma gets home and the mood gets ugly.

CLIFF. She's gonna have to get used to me someday. (*Grabs PAULINE and hugs her.*) When all her grandkids got the last name a' Foley, she'll come around and start likin' me. (*Kisses her.*)

PAULINE (*pulls away*). Don't be doin' that in front a' my brother. Let's get movin'.

(*CHARLOTTE enters with a bag of groceries; looks reproachfully at CLIFF.*)

CHARLOTTE. ...you're late for work, Pauline.

CLIFF. 'Afternoon, Mrs. Steele.

CHARLOTTE (*starts putting the groceries away*). Ain't you supposed to be workin', too?

CLIFF. I'm through for the day, ma'am.

CHARLOTTE. This early? Well, if you got so much free time, maybe you better start lookin' for a second job, Cliff. Or a *better* job.

CLIFF. Now, that's a thought.

CHARLOTTE. You bury old Mr. Porter today?

CLIFF. Sure did. 'Cept that was no funeral. That was a side-show at a carnival.

PAULINE (*laughs*). Them Porters never did like each other, did they?

CLIFF. Nope. Sorriest thing I ever saw. Nobody cried. Just sat around and gave each other the evil eye. Didn't even go up and look at the body. Then Joe Porter comes in, drunker than shit, pulls a handful a' nails outta one pocket and a hammer outta the other and yells, I come to nail down the coffin lid! He run up to the casket, slammed down the lid and started hammerin' in those nails! (*He and PAULINE laugh; CHARLOTTE and PHILIP do not.*) His brothers grabbed 'im and they started fightin' like cats and dogs. Damn near knocked the old man over! Then they started drinkin', right there in the funeral parlor. Half of 'em didn't even bother to go to the cemetery for the burial. Joe did, though. He was the first one there and the last to leave. Said he wanted to make damn sure the old man was six feet under.

PAULINE. Are you makin' that up?

CLIFF. No, ma'am. Cheapest, most violent, drunken funeral I ever seen. Only flowers was them daisies there.

CHARLOTTE. What are those things doin' here?

PAULINE. Cliff always brings me flowers.

CHARLOTTE. I don't want you bringin' my daughter no more flowers from the dead. You hear me?

PHILIP. But these are our daisies, Ma.

CHARLOTTE. No, they ain't. After we sell 'em, they ain't ours no more. Get those outta my house.

CLIFF. Yes, ma'am. (*Looks at PHILIP.*) I hear one a' them Hamlin kids looks a lot like Joe Porter. You think so, Phil?

PHILIP. ...I never noticed.

CHARLOTTE. Now, how would he know?

CLIFF. Phil's good friends with Clara Hamlin, ain't ya, Phil?

CHARLOTTE. That true, Phil?

PHILIP (*baffled*). ...not really. I just...just stop there some days and talk to 'er boys.

CHARLOTTE. I wouldn't be doin' that if I were you. You know what folks'll say about ya.

PHILIP. I can't help what folks'll say, Ma. Folks'll say whatever they want, whether there's any truth to it or not.

CLIFF. Is it true that Hamlin dog can talk, Phil?

PAULINE (*laughs*). What?!

CLIFF. Joe Porter 'imself told me that old hound dog up there got hit by lightnin' last spring and ever since then it can talk. I swear it! Joe said he kneeled down to scratch its head one day and said, how you doin', old fella? And that mutt said, Fine, Joe. I'm doin' real fine. Joe said he almost had a heart attack.

PAULINE. That true, Phil?

PHILIP. ...I ain't never heard that dog talk.

CHARLOTTE. Cliff, get your sorry butt outta here. And get that hearse outta my yard. I don't like that thing parked in front a' my house. Seems to me I told you that before.

CLIFF (*defensively*). Now, what's everybody got against that old hearse all of a sudden? That's probably the finest automobile in this town! It sure as hell is the biggest.

CHARLOTTE. It's a morbid thing to look at. Besides...when-ever that thing's out there, folks'll know you're visitin' my daughter.

CLIFF (*annoyed*). And what, pray tell, is so terrible about that?

CHARLOTTE. I don't feel like gettin' in no fight today with you, Cliff. We've been through this before. You ain't got a steady job and you're way too old for my Pauline.

PAULINE. I'm twenty-one, Ma! I ain't no kid!

CHARLOTTE. And he's fifty and divorced!

CLIFF. I ain't fifty! I'm forty-four! And I've been divorced for over twenty years, for Christ's sake! You act like I got leprosy!

CHARLOTTE. Go find somebody your own age! You got no right robbin' the cradle with my daughter!

PAULINE. I can make up my own mind who I wanna see, Ma! You ain't got no right meddlin' in my personal business!

CHARLOTTE. As long as you're livin' under my roof, I got a right! Now, get to work!

CLIFF. Why don't you just come out and tell the truth, Mrs. Steele!? It ain't my age. It's because a' my ex-wife's occupation, ain't it? Look, it ain't nobody's business what that girl does for a livin'. I ain't even spoke to her since 1915! I'm gettin' real tired a' the way I get treated around here! Who the hell do you think you are, anyway? Royalty?! You grow *daisies* in the summer and *starve* the rest a' the year! And you've had two husbands yourself! One ran off on ya and the other was a loony you had sent away to the state asylum, so if I was you, I wouldn't go castin' no stones at nobody!

CHARLOTTE (*grabs a broom and gets ready to hit him*).
...you get the hell outta my house, Cliff Foley!

CLIFF. Oh, I'm leavin'! I'm leavin'! You comin', Pauline?

CHARLOTTE (*grabs PAULINE by her arm*). She ain't goin' no place with you! Get out, I said!

PAULINE. Just go, Cliff.

CLIFF. I'll pick you up in the alley at six. (*Exits angrily.*)

CHARLOTTE. I've had it, Pauline. I don't ever wanna see that man around here again, and I mean business.

PAULINE. What you got against 'im, Ma? What's he ever done to you?

CHARLOTTE. You really wanna marry a man twenty-three years older than you who's got a *whore* for an ex-wife?

PAULINE. I don't care what his ex-wife does. Why should you?

CHARLOTTE. Pauline, I want you to better yourself when you get married. He ain't got money or a job. And he's always tellin' them idiotic tall tales. I don't think he's right in the head.

PAULINE. I *like* Cliff, Ma. He makes me laugh, he ain't afraid a' nothin' and he knows how to have a good time.

CHARLOTTE. You like a man who insults your family?

PAULINE. Oh, he didn't mean nothin' by that. Besides, what he said was true.

CHARLOTTE. I want you to have a better life than me. I don't want you to marry no louse who...who's gonna leave the house one day and not come back.

PAULINE. Cliff loves me. He wouldn't do that.

CHARLOTTE. Like hell he won't.

PAULINE. I'm goin' to work. And then I'm goin' out with Cliff, and there ain't nothin' you can do about it. (*Starts to exit.*)

CHARLOTTE. If you go out with him, Pauline, you don't need to come back tonight.

PAULINE. ...you throwin' me out?

CHARLOTTE. I guess I am. That man is garbage, and if you see him again, you ain't my daughter no more.

PAULINE. Fine! I ain't your daughter no more! (*Exits.*)

CHARLOTTE (*yells after her*). Don't ever set foot in this house again and don't say *nothin'* to me if ya pass me on

the street! (*Slams the door shut.*)...get them flowers outta here, Phil. I *hate* the way funeral flowers smell...even if they are our daisies.

PHILIP (*picks up the flowers*). ...all right.

CHARLOTTE. We'll eat supper soon.

PHILIP. I don't want supper, Ma, I ain't hungry.

CHARLOTTE. Where you goin'? You ain't goin' to see Clara Hamlin, are ya?

PHILIP. No, but I don't think there's nothin' wrong with me visitin' those boys. They ain't got a father...and there's a lot a' work that needs to be done around there.

CHARLOTTE. That what you do there? Work?

PHILIP (*defensively*). What do ya think I do there?

CHARLOTTE. You tell me.

PHILIP. I try and clean up the place and I tell the boys about Jesus.

CHARLOTTE. Look, Phil. I already got enough problems with your sister. Do me a favor and don't go gettin' too neighborly with the Hamlins. I ain't got nothin' against Clara, but she's got a real bad reputation.

PHILIP. They need friends.

CHARLOTTE. Well, why do you have to be the one to befriend 'em?

PHILIP. Because I know the Lord wants me to help those people. He put their house right on the road I take my walks down. And I ain't gonna turn my back on what the Lord wants me to do.

CHARLOTTE. Don't get self-righteous with me, Philip Steele. There's two things in this world I hate. One is your sister bein' engaged to an old drunk who digs graves and has an ex-wife who works in a whorehouse in East Union! And the other is you gettin' self-righteous.

PHILIP. I wasn't bein' self-righteous, Ma.

CHARLOTTE. Get them flowers outta here.

PHILIP. I'll take 'em out back by the well. Don't make me nothin' for supper, Ma.

CHARLOTTE. You ain't fastin' again, are ya? Your pa used to do that and I could never make no sense of it. How his starvin' 'imself was gonna get anybody outta purgatory was beyond me.

PHILIP. I just ain't hungry. (*Starts to leave.*)

CHARLOTTE. Phil?

PHILIP. What?

CHARLOTTE. Where you goin'?

PHILIP (*annoyed*). I'm gettin' rid a' the flowers, like you told me.

CHARLOTTE. Why don't you walk into town? It's Friday, ain't it? Don't Miss Gardner's group from the church get together on Fridays?

PHILIP. ...they used to.

CHARLOTTE. Well, *go*, Phil. Go *talk* to somebody. Mingle with people. There's a lot a' pretty girls your age up at the church. Sarah Howley had the worst crush on you in high school. I ran into her in town the other day and she asked all about you. She's real nice, she ain't married, and I know she's in that church group.

PHILIP. I don't wanna marry Sarah Howley. I don't wanna marry nobody.

CHARLOTTE. Then don't marry 'er! Just go *talk* to 'er! Do somethin' *normal*, for Christ's sake! (*He looks shocked and offended.*) I'm sorry, Phil. It's just that you spend too much time alone. It seems the only people you ever talk to are the Hamlins. I worry about you. You're too much like your pa. He didn't have no friends, neither.

PHILIP. Ma...please stop tryin' to make me into somebody I ain't.