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A GAME

A One-Act Play

by

DENNIS E. NOBLE

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(A GAME)

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NOTES ON THE PLAY

When this play was published, Dennis E. Noble, the author, was a Shubert Playwriting Fellow and Ph. D. candidate at the University of Colorado. Mr. Noble had this to say about his play:

“‘A Game’ begins as farce and ends in deadly earnest. I realize that it is unusual to shift from one mood completely to its opposite. But it was in this move from the comic to the serious that I hoped to keep the characters simple in order to hinder emotional identification with them. The characters exist in this play in the service of an idea, and I wished that the dramatization of that idea would strike the viewer hard. And it is in the violent impact of the ending that I hoped the viewer would share Dr. Henning’s confusion, and complain as does he: ‘But it’s only a game!’ And it is a game, this playing with nationalism. But it is a deadly game. It kills.”

Perhaps this play gives an insight to the question, “Why is there so much hate in the world?” Why does Country A hate Country B? Why does one section of our nation despise another section? Why does one college consider another college its enemy? Why must I weep and hang the coach in effigy if your school’s football team beats my school’s football team? What extra importance do I attach to something just because it’s MINE?

In this script—which can be staged simply or with multi-media effects—Mr. Noble has combined fantastical elements of the Theatre of the Absurd with realistic aspects of the traditional theatre to produce a play with a powerful impact.

A GAME

Dennis E. Noble's *A Game* was a winner in the 1971 nationwide play-writing contest conducted by Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, Fla. It was presented at Jacksonville University June 9-12, 1971, with an all-girl cast under the direction of Ralph Andrews:

Dr. Henning	Florence M. Sikes
Carter	Nancy Blocksidge
Baker	Judy Alperin
Edson	Bette Green

This acting script and the accompanying Director's Production Script were based on a performance at the Schulenburg Theatre Festival April 7 and 8, 1972, with the following cast under the direction of Patrick Castle of Texas A & M University:

Dr. Henning	Keith Deterling
Carter	Mark Meyer
Baker	Billy Wagner
Edson	Ray Grasshoff

Scene: A bare room

Time: The present



A Director's Production Script is available for this play

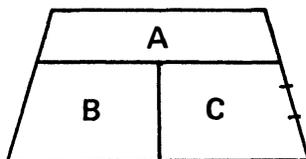
Stage directions in this acting script have been kept to a minimum because actors are more likely to create their own business if they are forced to use their imagination. However, full stage directions are given in the Director's Production Script which accompanies this play.

In addition, the Director's Production Script (director's prompt book) contains drawings of costumes and set, full discussion of characterization and other aspects of staging, a discussion of the play and its background, and other information helpful to the experienced and inexperienced director alike. A Director's Production Script may be obtained from the publisher.

A Game

By Dennis E. Noble

[The scene is a bare room with one chair at Up Center and a lightbulb hanging about seven feet above the stage. Lines drawn on the floor divide the stage into three areas. Area A is located upstage and runs the width of the stage. Area B encompasses the right half of the stage below A, and Area C is the left half of the stage below A (see diagram below). Each area shares a border with the other two and is equal in the amount of space within its borders. There are no windows. A door opens into the room at Stage Left (in Area C).



DR. HENNING enters, looks about the room, checks the bulb, and flips through charts on a clipboard which he is carrying. He hears a noise. He turns toward the door. His subjects have arrived. They enter three abreast.]

HENNING. Ah, here at last. Well, Mr. Edson...

[The three MEN stop opposite Dr. Henning.]

BAKER. I'm not Edson. I'm Baker. [To CARTER, who is in the center of the trio] Are you Edson?

CARTER. No, I'm not Edson. I'm Carter. [To Edson] Are you Edson?

EDSON. Yes, I'm Edson.

CARTER. How do you do? I'm Baker and this is Carter.

BAKER. No. You're Carter and I'm Edson.

CARTER. Oh, that's right. [*To Baker*] I'm sorry, Mr. Edson.

EDSON. He's not Edson. I'm Edson. [*Of Baker*] He's Carter.

BAKER. Are you sure?

CARTER. He doesn't look like Carter.

HENNING. Gentlemen, I know you from your pictures on file in my office, so let me introduce us. [*To Baker*] You're Baker. [*To Carter*] You're Carter. [*To Edson*] You're Edson. And I'm Dr. Henning.

CARTER. [*To Edson*] It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Edson.

EDSON. [*To Carter*] The pleasure is mine, Dr. Henning. [*Shake hands*]

CARTER. [*Shakes Baker's hand*] Mr. Baker.

BAKER. Dr. Henning.

HENNING. No, no, gentlemen. I'm Dr. Henning.

CARTER. [*To Baker*] If you're Baker; [*to Edson*] you're Edson; [*to Dr. Henning*] and you're Dr. Henning, then who is Carter?

HENNING. You're Carter.

CARTER. I'm Carter?

HENNING. Yes.

EDSON. He doesn't look like Carter.

CARTER. [*To Baker*] It's a pleasure to know you, Mr. Edson. My name is Carter. [*Shakes his hand*]

BAKER. It's my pleasure.

CARTER. [*To Edson*] Mr. Baker. [*Shakes his hand*]

EDSON. Mr. Carter.

HENNING. Your name tags, gentlemen. Look at your name tags.

CARTER. That's strange. It appears that my name is Edson, after all.

BAKER. And mine is Dr. Henning.

EDSON. And I'm Carter.

HENNING. [*Looking at his tag*] And I'm Baker. No, those names are all wrong! I know I'm Dr. Henning. I can prove it. [*Recites*] "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."

CARTER. Did you ever hear such a thing?

BAKER. That's deep.

EDSON. What does it mean?

HENNING. We in the behavioral sciences leave such matters to our undergraduates.

CARTER. Then you must be Dr. Henning.

HENNING. I am! I am!

CARTER. [*Shakes his hand*] It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Henning. I'm...[*looks at his tag*] I'm not Edson!

BAKER. [*Shakes his hand*] How do you do, Dr. Henning. I'm...[*looks at his tag*] I'm not Dr. Henning!

EDSON. [*Shakes his hand*] It's a great pleasure, Dr. Henning. I'm...[*looks at his tag*] I'm not Carter!

HENNING. Gentlemen, gentlemen...please. We must have order.

BAKER. He's a scientist, all right.

EDSON. Yes. Scientists are dependent upon order.

HENNING. [*To Baker*] Give me my name tag, please. [*BAKER does so.*] Thank you. And this one is yours. [*Hands Baker his name tag; looks at Carter and Edson*] Now if you will exchange your name tags, please. [*They do so.*] Will you read your names?

CARTER. I'm Carter.

EDSON. I'm Edson.

BAKER. I'm Baker.

HENNING. And I'm...I'm...[*looks at his name tag*] Dr. Henning.

CARTER. [*Starts to shake hands again*] It's a pleasure...

HENNING. No, never mind. I don't think that will be necessary. Well, gentlemen, I suppose you're wondering why you are here.

BAKER. I'm not wondering. [*To Edson*] Were you wondering, Edson?

EDSON. No, I'm not wondering. [*To Carter*] Were you wondering, Carter?

CARTER. About what?

EDSON. I've forgotten. Now what was I wondering about?

BAKER. I wonder.

HENNING. You are here, gentlemen, to play a game.

CARTER. A game?

HENNING. A game.

BAKER. You want us to play a game?

HENNING. Yes.

EDSON. You want the three of us to play a game?

HENNING. Yes.

CARTER. All right.

BAKER. What kind of a game?

HENNING. An experiment.

CARTER. Experiment?

EDSON. I used to play that, but my mother caught me and gave me a spanking.

HENNING. No, you don't understand. The game is not called "experiment". It *is* an experiment. It's an experiment in mind-warping through participatory sloganism.

CARTER. Did you ever hear such a thing?

BAKER. That's deep.

EDSON. What does it mean?

HENNING. We want to determine the effectiveness of modern advertising in its manipulation of the buying public.

BAKER. Manipulation?

EDSON. I used to do that, but my mother caught me and gave me a spanking.

HENNING. Gentlemen, please. You must pay attention. Now, you will notice that there is, in this room, a light, a chair, and the door by which you entered.

BAKER. Hey, I didn't notice that.

CARTER. Scientists are supposed to notice things like that.

EDSON. I noticed it.

BAKER. You did? I didn't.

EDSON. Well, I did.

CARTER. I notice some lines on the floor, Dr. Henning.

EDSON. I noticed that, too.

BAKER. You did? I didn't.

HENNING. [*Bursting in*] Those lines on the floor divide the room into three separate but equal sections.

CARTER. How about that?

EDSON. I didn't notice *that*.

BAKER. I didn't, either.

HENNING. Choose one of those sections for this experiment by standing in the middle of it.

BAKER. You want us to stand in the middle of it?

HENNING. [*In exasperation*] Just do as I ask! [*They all move to the same section.*] No, separate sections. [*They make the adjustment. CARTER is in Area A, EDSON in Area B, and BAKER in Area C.*] Now, that is your territory. You own it.

BAKER. I own this section?

HENNING. Yes.

EDSON. And I own this section?

HENNING. Yes.

CARTER. I don't like this game.

HENNING. [*He hurries.*] Here, take these. [*He hands each of them a piece of paper.*] Commit those words to memory. You will repeat those words, in unison, whenever that light comes on. And you must finish your recitation before the light goes off. Are there any questions?

CARTER. I don't like this game.

BAKER. That isn't a question.

CARTER. It isn't?

BAKER. No.

CARTER. Oh.

EDSON. [*Reading*] "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine." [*Pause; to Henning*] That's all?

HENNING. That's all.

BAKER. And you want us to repeat this?

HENNING. Yes.

CARTER. Whenever the light comes on?

HENNING. Yes.

EDSON. And finish before it goes off?

HENNING. Yes.

CARTER. I don't like this game.

HENNING. Now, when the door is closed, the light is activated. So when I leave, the game will begin.

EDSON. You're going to leave?

HENNING. Yes.

BAKER. Why?

HENNING. Because my presence might affect your response.

BAKER. You won't affect my response. Will he affect your response, Edson?

EDSON. No, he won't affect my response, either. Will he affect your response, Carter?

CARTER. What response?

EDSON. I don't know.

BAKER. What response, Dr. Henning?

HENNING. I'll be watching and listening at my instrument

panel. Have fun, gentlemen. [*Goes to door*] Remember, you must enter the game with spirit. [*He exits. Instantly, the light comes on.*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

[*They stumble over the words and are not in unison. When they finish, they remain rigidly in place, waiting for the light to come on again. They wait...and finally...*]

BAKER. What's the name of this game, Edson?

EDSON. I don't know.

CARTER. What's the point of this game, Baker?

BAKER. I don't know.

EDSON. How do we play this game, Carter?

CARTER. I don't know.

[*Light*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

[*They wait.*]

BAKER. Do you think Dr. Henning knows?

EDSON. He should know.

CARTER. After all, it's his game.

EDSON. And besides, he's a scientist.

CARTER. Scientists are supposed to know all about such things.

BAKER. What things?

CARTER. Games.

[*Light*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

EDSON. If we don't know what the game is, how do we know when it's over?

BAKER. Dr. Henning will tell us.

EDSON. Dr. Henning isn't here.

BAKER. Hey, that's right.

CARTER. He'll come back.

EDSON. How do you know he will?

CARTER. Do you think he's just going to leave us here?

EDSON. How do we know he won't?

BAKER. Hey, that's right.

[*Light*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

BAKER. You go ask him, Edson.

EDSON. All right. [*He starts to cross into Baker's territory.*]

BAKER. Stop. You didn't say, "May I." You go, Carter.

CARTER. May I?

BAKER. Yes.

CARTER. I don't want to.

BAKER. You've got to. I gave you permission.

CARTER. I don't like that game.

BAKER. I'll do it, then. [*He tries to open the door. It's locked; he knocks; no response; he knocks again.*] He doesn't answer.

EDSON. He's locked us in.

CARTER. I have to go to the bathroom.

EDSON. Why do you think he locked us in?

BAKER. Maybe he doesn't want us to get out.

CARTER. Why wouldn't he want us to get out?

EDSON. Maybe he wants us to stay here.

CARTER. That's probably it.

BAKER. I have to go to the bathroom.

[*Light*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

EDSON. I have to go to the bathroom.

CARTER. I wonder why there's only one chair in here?

EDSON. I wonder if he'll let us go to the bathroom?

CARTER. [*Moves to Stage Center where all three areas share a*

common border; looks at markings] Do you think it'll give me a shock if I touch it?

BAKER. No, it won't give you a shock.

EDSON. How can it give you a shock? There aren't any wires.

BAKER. Go ahead. Touch it.

CARTER. Why don't you?

BAKER. What? And get a concussion?

EDSON. How can you get a concussion? There aren't any wires.

BAKER. Then you do it.

EDSON. What? And get electrocuted?

CARTER. I'll do it. [*He puts his foot out and very gently touches the border. Nothing happens. He places his foot down more firmly. And then he rests his entire weight on his foot. Nothing*]

[*Light*]

TOGETHER. "This is my land. It is mine. It is beautiful, and it is mine."

[*CARTER looks at his foot. EDSON and BAKER look at Carter.*]

EDSON. [*Quietly*] Get your foot off my property, Carter.

BAKER. And mine, too, Carter.

[*CARTER regards them curiously for a moment, and then moves back into his own territory.*]

CARTER. [*Looking at his property*] You know, I think Henning made an error.

BAKER. In what way?

CARTER. My territory is smaller than yours.

EDSON. No, it isn't. They're all the same size.

CARTER. Look at it. See? Doesn't mine look smaller?

[*EDSON and BAKER look.*]