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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **RUNNING IN THE RED**

**A Farcical Comedy**  
**by**  
**KARL TIEDEMANN**



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Ronald Gwiazda, Rosenstone/Wender,  
3 E. 48th St., New York NY 10017  
Phone (212) 832-8330

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The Flat Rock Playhouse and Tryon Rotary Club in Flat Rock, N.C., gave *RUNNING IN THE RED* its world premiere in August 1994. The production was directed by Kenneth Kay and included the following artists:

Nellie Simpson . . . . . KIM COZORT  
Rudy Williams . . . . . ANDREW POND  
Jerry Walker . . . . . PETER THOMASSON  
Eve Williams . . . . . ELIZABETH KARR  
Joe Freedman . . . . . BOB GREENBERG  
Charley Jacobs . . . . . ALLEN LEWIS RICKMAN  
Warren Foster . . . . . SCOTT TREADWAY  
Ted Packer . . . . . TERRY LOUGHLIN  
J.S. Massie . . . . . STEVE CARLISLE  
Edwina Holcomb . . . . . LINDA EDWARDS  
Officer Ed Kennedy . . . . . WAYNE TETRICK

Production Stage Manager . . . . . BILL MUNOZ  
Scenic Designer . . . . . DENNIS C. MAULDEN  
Lighting Designer . . . . . TODD O. WREN  
Costume Designer . . . . . BRIDGET BARTLETT  
Sound Designer . . . . . HILLIARD L. BALLARD  
Properties Master . . . . . BILL NOLAN

Executive and Artistic Director . . . . . ROBIN R. FARQUHAR  
Playhouse Co-founder . . . . . LEONA F. FARQUHAR  
Assoc. Artistic Dir. & Development Dir. . . . . SCOTT TREADWAY  
Executive Administrator . . . . . PAIGE POSEY  
Production Manager . . . . . JAMES P. HART JR.  
Technical Director . . . . . CHRISTOPHER C. ORT

# RUNNING IN THE RED

A Play in Two Acts  
For 8 Men and 3 Women

## CHARACTERS

*ANNOUNCER	.....	seen only in silhouette
JERRY WALKER	.....	30s
EVE WILLIAMS	.....	late 20s
NELLIE SIMPSON	.....	late middle-age
RUDY WILLIAMS	.....	early 20s
JOE FREEDMAN	.....	about 50
CHARLEY JACOBS	.....	about 50
WARREN FOSTER	.....	about 30
TED PACKER	.....	late 30s to 40s
EDWINA HOLCOMB	.....	40s to 50s
J.S. MASSIE	.....	50s
*OFFICER ED KENNEDY	.....	late 30s to 40s

\* These two parts may be played by the same actor.

(The characters of RUDY, JOE, and OFFICER KENNEDY may be turned into female parts, if so desired. Alternative lines for these parts are incorporated into the playscript in boldface type.)

PLACE: New York City.

TIME: September, 1934.

BEFORE RISE: *Lively period dance band music has been playing, and increases in volume as house lights dim. It is nearly half-past eight in the evening, mid-September.*

## PROLOGUE

*(In the center of the stage is a large white cut-out space in the shape of an old Philco cathedral radio. The silhouette of a microphone on a stand is in the center of the space. Bordering the top of the space, in cut-out letters, we read "THE HOUR OF SMILES." The music rises in volume and climaxes. Applause. Meanwhile, a dapper ANNOUNCER (silhouetted) strides in from the left and takes his place at the microphone. He holds a script and speaks swiftly.)*

ANNOUNCER. Thank you, Victor Young. And this concludes our special summer series of the *Hour of Smiles*, featuring the comedy team of Jerry Walker and Eve Williams. One week from tonight, Mr. Al Jolson returns to this microphone for a brand new season of programs brought to you by the makers of Ipana toothpaste and Sal Hepatica. Be sure to tune in for this grand hour of music and laughter. And now, a final word from Walker—and Williams!

*(Music intro comes in sharp, fading as the silhouettes of EVE and JERRY, who are a vaudeville team of the smart boy-dumb girl type, enter from right. ANNOUNCER exits opposite way.)*

JERRY. Well, Eve, we've had quite a summer, haven't we?

EVE. We sure have, Jerry—and it was swell being out in Hollywood last month!

JERRY. That was pretty exciting.

EVE. I'll say! I wanna go back next year, see *more* of California. I wanna visit La Jolla, and San Jose. (*Mispronounces these, sounding the "j's."*)

JERRY. No, no, no—it's pronounced La *Hoya*, and San *Hosay*—the "j's" become "h's."

EVE. Ohhhh, the "j's" become— Oh, I get it now.

JERRY. So when do you plan on going back West?

EVE. Oh, I was thinking of either—Hune or Huly! (*Audience laughter.*)

JERRY. Hune or—oh, for heaven's sake. Say, didn't you go to school, dopey?

EVE. Yes—and I came out the same way!

JERRY (*over audience laughter*). You sure did... Well, folks, we wanna thank you for listening this past summer. We've really had fun.

EVE. We sure have.

*(JERRY's tone becomes more natural and he tosses his script aside.)*

JERRY. But we'll say "so long" instead of "goodbye," because starting in just six weeks, we'll be appearing on our very own program, Tuesday nights on another network.

EVE (*voice dropping in pitch*). What? What did you—

JERRY (*in fast*). So, be sure to check your local listings.

Say good night, Eve!

EVE (*distractedly*). Good night!



*(Applause, and orchestra comes in big with closing theme, EVE flings down her script, starts bickering in whispered tones with JERRY. Then, as ANNOUNCER reenters, she makes a final gesture of dismissal, and exits, followed swiftly by JERRY.)*

ANNOUNCER *(as lights slowly dim)*. Tune in next week at this time for the *Hour of Smiles*—brought to you by Ipana toothpaste for the smile of beauty, and Sal Hepatica for the smile of health. This program came from New York. Bill Goodwin speaking. This is CBS: the Columbia Broadcasting System!

*(As everything goes black, recorded applause comes up. The "radio" continues to play as the curtain rises.)*

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *Living room of the first floor duplex apartment of Eve Williams, East 60s, Manhattan. See Production Notes at end of book for detailed description of set.*

AT RISE: *During the following, NELLIE emerges from the upstairs corridor and stomps down the staircase in high dudgeon. She is a formidable lady of a certain age, dressed for travel and carrying a small suitcase. A small gong sound emanates from the radio.*

2ND ANNOUNCER *(voice-over)*. Eight-thirty p.m.: B-U-L-O-V-A, Bulova watch time, courtesy of the Bulova Watch Company, Fifth Avenue... WABC, New York.

*(Another program starts as NELLIE crosses to the front door and prepares to leave. The phone rings. NELLIE, exasperated, pauses. Then, with a long-suffering sigh, she puts down her stuff, turns the radio volume down partially, and picks up the phone. Her tone is clipped and impatient.)*

NELLIE. Hello, Miss Williams' residence... No—nobody's here... You may very well have an appointment—I wouldn't know... *or care*... What I *mean*, ma'am, is that I am no longer employed here... I—Madam, I didn't even have to answer the phone—it was an act of pure charity on my part!... Yes. All *right*... Just a moment... *(Finds pad and pencil on the bookshelf.)* Yes? *(Writing.)* Miss Holcomb... Columbia University Press... Yes... They just now finished up so she should be home in a few minutes... Well, yes: Studio's on Madison. They're out the door before the announcer finishes. A page holds the express elevator for them. Out to the street, through St. Patrick's to Fifth Avenue, grab a cab, and straight up here to Sixty-seventh... Yes, they go *through* St. Patrick's— Well, it generally saves them at least sixty seconds... Ninety, if they don't stop to light a candle. Yes... All *right*... Goodbye. *(She hangs up, leaves the message on the shelf, thinks for a moment and goes up to the bedroom door.)* Mr. Rudy?... *(Thumps again.)* I know you're in there... I'll give you one more chance. Am I going to be paid or not? *(Beat.)* Very well I am finished! I am leaving—oh, but first, I must complete my duties! *(She picks up several letters from the end table and drops them on the floor outside the bedroom door.)* Here's your mail! *(She wipes her feet briefly on the let-*

*ters, before shoving them under the door with her foot. She then picks up the decanter from the shelf.) Here's your drink! ... (She pours contents onto floor just outside RUDY's door, then strides toward front entrance. Suddenly she halts and, inspired, backtracks slightly.) Oh—and there's a very important telephone message for you— (Savagely tears up message she's written.) on the shelf! (She neatly places fragments on shelf, strides to the front door, opens it, and exits, slamming it behind her. Beat.)*

RUDY (*offstage*). Holy—!

*(RUDY's bedroom door bangs open. He is reading a letter—presumably one of the items just pushed under the door—and his eyes widen in alarm.)*

RUDY. Oh, no. No, no, no!

*(Doorbell rings. RUDY freezes. Another ring, and voices are heard from beyond the front door. A key is heard in the lock. Panicked, RUDY runs back into his bedroom as the front door opens and EVE WILLIAMS and JERRY WALKER come in. JERRY carries EVE's suitcase and overnight bag for her. They are quarreling.)*

EVE. No! I've had it. I'm through!

*(JERRY puts down luggage and hangs his hat and coat on coat tree.)*

JERRY. Whaddya squawking about? I just got us the biggest deal of our lives!

EVE. And only told me about it five minutes ago—on the air! How could you?...

*(During the following, JERRY starts to dart around the apartment, straightening things.)*

EVE. We only get back from California this afternoon, I don't even have a chance to catch my breath, and then you make this big, public— *(Realizes.)* I get it now, you wanted to box me in! So I'd *have* to string along. Well, not this time, Jerry!

JERRY. This is our own network show. Tuesday nights, NBC Red, right after Ed Wynn! Any other comedian would kill for this spot. Kid, everything we've put into this act for the last four years has finally paid off... No more vaudeville, no more tank towns, no more one-night stands! We're gonna make three thousand a week and reach twenty million people, all at once.

EVE. Oh, goody—instead of embarrassing myself in front of the whole country in little chunks, I get to do it all at once!... *(Snaps off the radio.)* I only got into this thing 'cause there was no other way to stay in school once the Depression hit. Now here it is four years later, I'm not *any* closer to earning my doctorate—and I'm this great big national...*joke!*

JERRY. You're not—

EVE. Why can't I just *play* an idiot? Why do I have to make like I'm *really* stupid?

JERRY. You gotta maintain your *image*.

EVE. *Why?*... I just saw an article in *Photoplay* about Carole Lombard—said how *smart* she was, how many *books* she reads...

JERRY (*patiently*). Carole Lombard plays a *variety* of roles. She's a professional actress. *You* are a comic "personality"... You are "Eve Williams"...

EVE. Professional idiot!

JERRY. Exactly!

EVE. I— (*Stops; glares at him.*) Well, don't you forget, I'm also E.J. Williams, author of eight articles last year in *American Scholar*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Journal of Psychological Research*, the *American History Review*, the—

JERRY. And I think that's terrific! Honest! Just keep it to yourself, huh? 'Specially tonight when Massie comes by... He's paying for the idiot—not the egghead.

EVE. And who is "Massie"?

JERRY. The guy who's coming here, Mr. J. Scott Massie III. Our new sponsor. President— (*EVE moans exasperatedly.*) president of Continental Breakfast Foods, one of the largest privately owned corporations in the country. He's gonna bankroll our new show. We'll be pulling in so much cash— (*JERRY notices a book-length manuscript on the shelf, picks it up, flips through it idly.*)

EVE. Hey! You put that down! (*Flies over to him, snatches manuscript away.*) That's my book!

JERRY (*looking around*). These are *all* your books!

EVE. I mean, *this* one I wrote!

JERRY. You wrote a *book*?

EVE. Yes— E.J. Williams did! And it's already been sold!

JERRY. Hot stuff!... (*Taking hold of manuscript again.*) So, what—is it a love story, historical thing, or— (*Looks at title page, stops short.*) *The Treatment of Dementia Praecox Through the Dynamic Enhancement of the*

*Process of Symbolization. (Flips to last few pages, reads.)*

EVE. What are you doing?

JERRY. I just wanna see who the murderer is.

EVE (*angrily snatches it back*). Smart guy! ... It so happens the Columbia University Press is *publishing* this! They're gonna send round a contract any day now. Wake up, Jerry, this is my future! I'm through with comedy!

JERRY. Aw, but Eve, you can't just—

EVE (*putting manuscript in a drawer*). I am not doing a new radio show! I'm going back to college to get my degree! I've already lost enough time. Probably have to go to *summer school*. (*Picks up her luggage, heads toward kitchen.*)

JERRY. Summer school?

EVE (*haughtily*). Yes, Jerry. Summer school. It takes place every *Hune* and *Huly*! ...

*(She sails into the kitchen. Phone rings. JERRY goes to answer.)*

JERRY (*grumbling*). *Hune* and *Huly* ... (*Picks up phone.*)  
Yeah, what is it? (*Scowls, sighs*) Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.  
Hang on. (*Holding phone. Calls, a little distastefully.*)  
Eve—it's your ... *fiancé* ...

EVE (*off*). Oh! Just a minute ...

*(EVE enters from kitchen, holding a drink in one hand and a small envelope in the other. She heads straight for the phone.)*

EVE (to JERRY). I'm sorry, Jerry—I just can't continue playing this stupid *game* of yours when I happen to be an exceptionally mature and intelligent woman. (Takes phone from JERRY, speaks into it. Baby talk.) Hellooo, snooky-pooky! Hello, honey-bunny!

(She lapses into pure gibberish. JERRY, grimacing, crosses to couch and sits. As EVE continues, she starts to speak more normally, but still employs her "dumb" stage voice.)

EVE. You are? Oh, wonderful. All right! I'll be waiting... Love you!... (She makes kissing sounds, then hangs up, clasps her hands together, sighs and stares off dreamily. Pause.)

JERRY (dryly, shattering the mood). So when are you gonna dump that jerk?

EVE. Jer-ry! Warren is not a jerk. He happens to be one of the smartest men I've ever met... (Sighs soulfully.) You should just hear him talking about psychosocial maladjustment.

JERRY. Well, zing go the strings of my heart!

EVE. For *some* of us, there's nothing more attractive than intelligence!

JERRY (rising). Oh, yeah?... Well, then how come you don't show *him* any?

EVE. What do you mean?

JERRY. What do I— You act dumber for *him* than you do for the microphone.

EVE. Look—Warren first saw me on stage. Playing this delightful *character* of yours. I just think it's best that I reveal my *true* intelligence... over time.

JERRY. How *much* time? Six months and you've only just started to walk *erect* in front of him. And—when ya gonna tell him 'bout that *article*?

EVE. Article?

JERRY. You know! That big psychology thing they printed in—where was it?

EVE. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, Psychiatry and Psychotherapy.*

JERRY. Oh, that's right, they outbid *Cosmopolitan*, didn't they?

EVE. What about it?

JERRY. Well—it cuts up some book that snooky-pooky Warren wrote, don't it?

EVE. It does take issue with a few of—

JERRY. All *he* knows is that it was by someone called E.J. Williams. You're afraid to tell him the truth!

EVE. I am not! I know that Warren wouldn't take an academic disagreement personally. He's too wise, too good, too high-minded—

JERRY. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, tell me—what's it like to kiss His Holiness? I mean, *really* kiss him? (*EVE stammers.*) You have *kissed* him, haven't you?... Probably like puckering up to Volume II of the Encyclopedia Britannica. You deserve better, kid!

EVE (*angrily points at him with the hand that holds the envelope*). Now, listen—

JERRY (notices letter, snatches it away). What's this?

EVE. Hey!

JERRY. Mash note from Einstein?

EVE (*snatching it back*). I don't know—it was on the counter. (*Opens it, reads.*) From Nellie... She... Oh, no...

JERRY. What is it?



EVE. You think they'll swallow it?

*(Kitchen door smashes open. RUDY zooms out, crosses to front door.)*

RUDY. Lenin's nephew? Where? Where? *(He disappears out the front door as EVE starts to laugh again.)*

JERRY. I think so!

EVE. That'll fix him! ... Hey, Jerry?

JERRY. Yeah?

EVE. Routine one!

JERRY. Routine—how does that go?

*(In reply, she pulls him into a kiss. Meanwhile:)*

VOICE. Three cheers for the nephew of Comrade Lenin!  
Hip-hip—

VOICES. HOORAY!

*(A man, screaming, is seen passing by the open window, tossed up by the Communists. But, instead of PACKER, it is the hapless MASSIE. Hearing his cries for help, EVE leaps up and goes to the window, shouting to her over-enthusiastic friends that they've got the wrong man. JERRY leans back on the couch, a contented man. The cheers and MASSIE's trips continue as the radio music reaches a crescendo.)*

**CURTAIN—THE END**

## PRODUCTION NOTES

1) The gag involving the teacart traversing the stage and exiting out the front door can be accomplished in several ways. Methods range from the use of fishing wire, and tracks embedded in thick carpet, to the attaching of a remote-controlled toy car, to a lightly constructed, cloth-draped version of the cart. But, if preferred, the effect can be omitted and the following bit of business substituted: On the cue, "Give me a chance," Rudy rushes out of the kitchen, pushing the cart. He screams, "My coat's caught!," runs over Packer's foot, then pulls himself free and falls to the floor, giving the cart one last push that sends it safely out the front door. Done quickly enough, this gets by, though the original gag is preferred.

2) The bit with Eve (then Warren, then Massie) supposedly being tossed up and down outside by the communists can also be handled in a variety of ways. A particularly elegant method was devised during the play's initial production: A modified seesaw was built. One end of it was a platform that the actors could half sit, half lie upon. Once the performer was strapped in, crew members pushed down on the other side of the seesaw, propelling the actor upward into audience view. (But not too far upward, of course.) The result was very effective.

### SET DESCRIPTION

Eve Williams' living room is handsomely and tastefully furnished. The front door is located in the wall to the right. A coat rack stands near it. Further upstage is a door to a guest bedroom. Between these two doors is a large, tall

bookcase, well stocked with books and papers. A feather duster sits on one of the shelves, as does a radio, a small vase and a pad and pencil. Downstage area is dominated by a large sofa, which is flanked by an end table on the left, a couple of clean glasses on it. The rear wall features a large, open, picture window, a bit right of center. A few feet downstage is an armchair, which is wheeled, and able to recline and swivel. UL is a short staircase that leads up to a mezzanine, and a corridor which leads away to the left. A swinging door downstage in the left wall leads into a kitchen. Further upstage in this wall there is a bathroom door.

#### ADDITIONAL CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

**JERRY WALKER:** An intense, lively man, whose enthusiasm and impatience give him the appearance of being in constant motion. Glib, fast-talking, and intelligent.

**EVE WILLIAMS:** Pretty, very smart, she is much more intelligent than her stage character and her speaking voice is considerably lower than that of the breezy half-wit she plays on the air.

**NELLIE SIMPSON:** A no-nonsense lady.

**RUDY WILLIAMS:** He is an excitable boy of college age, always seeking to join with the “right” sociopolitical causes. His hair is short, but untidy; he is the only man we see without a necktie. Well-meaning, passionate, and not overly bright; tends to go overboard.

JOE FREEDMAN and CHARLEY JACOBS: They are a couple of seasoned, curmudgeonly and very Jewish ex-vaudevillians of indeterminate age, now radio gag writers, who know everything about show business, and every gag ever written. They live and breathe jokes and, after years on stage, speak in the artificial cadences of comedy cross-talk. Each assumes the other is always there; they often are not even looking at one another when they converse. They resemble a happily bickering married couple.

WARREN FOSTER: Academic type. Bespectacled, good-looking, more at home with books than people, who sometimes scare him. Fiancé to Eve.

TED PACKER: Dour, tough, somewhat sadistic, inquisitive, world-wise Broadway columnist.

EDWINA HOLCOMB: Tweedy, brisk, a somewhat stuffy lady fresh from the ivory towers of academe—the collegiate type.

J.S. MASSIE: Rotund, balding, genial Midwestern businessman. Not too sharp, but likable.

OFFICER ED KENNEDY: Well-meaning, rather slow-witted policeman whose zeal soon turns into frustration.