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Dramatic Publishing



A Play in One Act
by
JAY REID GOULD

The Long Silence



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE LONG SILENCE)

The Long Silence

A Play in One Act

FOR THREE MEN AND THREE WOMEN

CHARACTERS

REBA MCAULAY

MATTIE MCAULAY.....*her invalid sister*

MARY MCAULAY.....*their aunt*

ARASH

LAZAR

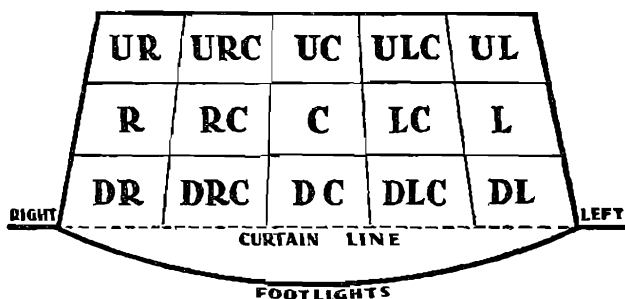
VASILLY

}.....*strangers*

PLACE: *The sitting-room of a fisherman's cottage on an island
off the coast of Maine.*

TIME: *The present. A windy night.*

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.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Window curtains or shade, wood-burning stove, pile of wood, rectangular table with drawer, cupboard, three straight chairs, oil lamp on table, pot of coffee on stove, dishes for Mary to set table, wheelchair, hooks on wall L; in cupboard: several coffee mugs, basket of mending, comb and compact (with lipstick), gun, acrostic game.

MARY: Tray of food.

REBA: Burlap bag supposedly containing some lobsters.

LAZAR: Card case, gun.

ARASH: Knife.

VASILLY: Gun.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

The Long Silence

SCENE: *The sitting-room of a fisherman's cottage on an island off the coast of Maine. The house is used only for a few months each year, and the furnishings are of the sparse, simple, sturdy type. The door to the outside is at L stage. Downstage of the door is a window with a shade or curtains. A few hooks to hang clothes are on the wall upstage of the door. In the R wall, upstage, a door opens on to other rooms in the house. The few necessary furnishings consist of a wood stove for warming against the upstage wall, U L C; left of the stove is a pile of wood. A plain rectangular table with a drawer is at R C, with the long side parallel to the audience. There are straight chairs at either end and one upstage of the table. On the table is an oil lamp. There is a cupboard U R C, against the upstage wall. Other furnishings can be used but are not essential to the action.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is early evening, and dark outside. The wind is blowing. A fire glows in the stove. On top of the stove is a coffee pot. AUNT MARY is setting out a few dishes at the left end of the table. She is a little rotund woman in her fifties, cheerful and bright. She wears a plain cotton house dress. She goes to the stove and puts a piece of wood in it, then crosses L, and opens the outside door. She listens briefly to the wind, then quickly closes the door and goes out U R, into the other room. She reappears immediately with her niece MATTIE, who is not yet twenty. MATTIE is an attractive young woman, now confined to a wheelchair. NOTE: In the playing of this character, MATTIE should show that she is keenly interested in things about her, but she cannot speak, and her hands should never move. She wears a simple dress. MARY wheels MATTIE D R. Then she takes a coffee mug from the cupboard and pours a cup*

of coffee from the pot on the stove. She brings it to MATTIE, putting MATTIE'S hand around the cup and guiding it to her lips, but always holding the cup for her. After a few swallows of coffee, MATTIE looks over toward the door L.]

MARY. Don't worry so, Mattie, dear. Reba will be here soon—dog-tired and hungry. [MATTIE takes another drink, then glances L again.] I don't like the wind, either. Had enough? [MATTIE nods and MARY takes cup out U R. In the brief time that she is gone, MATTIE leans her head back wearily and closes her eyes.]

[When MARY returns, U R, MATTIE raises her head and smiles. MARY goes to the stove and puts another piece of wood in it. Then she looks out the window. She sighs, gets a small basket of mending from the cupboard and sits down left of the table R C.]

MARY [as she mends]. You know, Mattie, if I live to be a hundred, I'll never get used to this place. I guess I just wasn't cut out to have anything to do with fish—except eat them. Next year you and me—we'll stay home and let Reba come up here and look after the lobster traps by herself. . . . Give me the mainland every time. Here, it's fog and wind and not a soul to talk to, hour after hour. [Realizes what she has said, rises, crosses quickly D R and puts a hand on MATTIE'S arm.] Oh, I don't mean you, Mattie, darling. You're going to talk one of these days—just like you used to. And you know how you used to like to talk. [MATTIE smiles.] See. What did I tell you? If you can smile, you can talk. You just keep believing the doctor. He knows his business, that one. [Stops talking and listens.] That wind! [Crosses back to table and sits again with her mending.] Yes, sir. When you get to talking and walking again, you and me'll head for the mainland and have ourselves a spree. Buckport's good enough for me. Electric lights, and washing machines, and all the comforts of home. . . . [There is a call from outside.] That's Reba now. You give her a

good big smile when she comes in. [*Rises.*] I bet she's wet through. [*MATTIE smiles at her. MARY goes out U R.*]

[*REBA MCAULAY comes in L. REBA is in her middle twenties, attractive and mature. She is dressed in rough-weather clothing, a heavy sweater and denim pants. She wears a cap of some kind. She looks tired and messy. She throws down a heavy burlap bag in a corner, U L, then speaks to MATTIE.*]

REBA. What a night! You and Aunt Mary can be thankful you're not out in it.

[*MARY comes in U R with a tray of food. REBA sits in the chair left of the table R C and proceeds to pull off her heavy boots.*]

MARY [*upstage of table*]. Mattie and me almost gave you up for good. [*Puts tray on table.*] Here's your supper. It's probably cold by now.

REBA. I had something to eat down in the village with the men. Just a slice of bread and a cup of coffee will do.

MARY. I declare! You don't eat enough to feed a sparrow. How're you going to do a man's work on that? . . . Well, anyway, you get that lobster smell off your hands and tell us the news.

REBA [*nodding toward bag U L*]. There's a couple of lobsters here. I'll put them on ice. [*Goes over to MATTIE and touches her shoulder.*] You look real pepped up tonight, Mattie. What happened?

MARY. Dr. Hancock came over from Buckport. That's what happened.

REBA. Young Dr. Hancock? Look, Aunt Mary. She's blushing—and at her age, too. [*Laughs, crosses U L, picks up bag and breezes out U R. MARY pours a cup of coffee and takes it to table.*]

MARY [*loudly*]. How many lobsters did you haul up today? [*Puts Reba's boots near cupboard.*]

REBA [*off U R*]. Thirty-five.

MARY. Get rid of them all?

[REBA re-enters U R. *She has taken off her cap and wears slippers.*]

REBA. Every last one of them. [*Sits upstage of table, drinking her coffee and taking a piece of bread from tray.*]

MARY. Have any trouble getting home? [*Sits left of table with her mending.*]

REBA. The tide's running strong tonight. That old motor struggled like sin coming 'round the point.

MARY. You have that thing fixed. . . . It isn't fair, Reba.

REBA [*half listening*]. What?

MARY. Taking risks like that. If anything happened to you, where'd we be? You get in before dark after this. We've had enough happen to this family.

REBA [*reproachfully*]. Aunt Mary!

MARY [*with feeling*]. Don't Aunt Mary me! Every time there's bound to be mention of your father, you hush me up. It isn't healthy. He was a fine man—and you just can't ignore him—alive or dead. [REBA rises abruptly, crosses L, opens outside door and leans against side. Then she turns and speaks.]

REBA. You're right, Aunt Mary. He was the best lobsterman around here. [*Looks out again, and stiffens.*]

MARY. What's the matter, dear?

REBA. That's funny. I thought I saw a light off the point. [*MARY joins her at door.*]

MARY [*searching*]. There it is! It seems to be blinking. . . . Oh, well, what's a light more or less 'way up here. That's all we ever see.

REBA. But no one would dare lay off Seal Point—the tide the way it is. They'd be on the rocks in no time. . . . Now, it's gone.

MARY. Perhaps we're seeing things. [MATTIE makes a noise. MARY turns, then crosses over to her.] All right, Mattie, darling. I know you're tired. We'll get you ready for bed. Then you can come back and play your game of letters for a little while—and talk some more with Reba. [*As she*

wheels MATTIE U R.] Put on some more wood, will you, dear? [MARY and MATTIE go out U R. REBA closes door and puts a stick of wood in stove. Then she takes off her shapeless sweater and hangs it on one of the hooks by the door L. She looks more attractive now. She then gets a comb and compact from cupboard, crosses C, combs her hair and puts on lipstick.]

[REBA is putting on lipstick when MARY re-enters U R.]

MARY [*coming above table*]. You're fancying all up. Expecting someone?

REBA. No.

MARY [*picking up tray*]. Seems like a waste of time out here, dear.

REBA. Look. I'm a fisherman all day. A few more years of this and I'll begin to look just like the men. A little dirty all the time, dry skin, hair in a tangle.

MARY. Good thing, too. You wouldn't last long if they kept thinking you're a woman all the time.

REBA. Just the same I want to remember that I am a woman, and this little gadget helps. . . . What did Dr. Hancock say about Mattie today?

MARY [*with a sigh*]. Same thing.

REBA [*upset*]. Same thing? You mean there's no improvement? . . . Oh, no! [*Paces D L.*]

MARY. Dr. Hancock says she's all right physically. [*Crosses U R with tray.*]

REBA [*explosively*]. What does he mean by that? She can't even help herself!

MARY [*pausing U R*]. He says her blood's good and muscles are all right. But what's holding her back is up here. [*Points to her head.*]

REBA [*bitterly*]. And all we have to do, I suppose, is wait for a miracle.

MARY [*patiently*]. Something like that, dear. . . .

REBA. Well, I don't believe in miracles. [*There is a pause. Then with a quick gesture she goes to cupboard and brings*

out a gun.] See this? If Mattie doesn't show some improvement in a couple of months, I'm going to put this where she can get at it—and pray to God she gets enough strength to use it. [*There is a tense pause while MARY looks sternly at REBA.*]

MARY [*quietly*]. Get Mattie's game ready for her, will you, dear? [*Goes out U R. After a thoughtful pause, REBA puts gun in drawer of table R C. Then she goes to cupboard and gets out box containing game of acrostics. She places it on table R C and just gets top off when she hears a noise from outside. She stiffens, then goes to door L, opens it and listens. She hears only the wind and the sea. She closes door and goes back to table. We can sense, however, that she is listening.*]

[*Suddenly the door L is violently opened, and a young man flings himself into the room. He is in his twenties, sturdy and strong. He is dressed in shapeless garments. He has been running, for he is clearly out of breath. He shuts the door and leans against it, and he and REBA look at each other tensely until she moves toward the table drawer.*]

ARASH. No! No! Stay where you are! [*He speaks with a definite accent.*] You are here alone?

REBA [*fearful, but trying not to show it*]. Who are you? What do you want?

ARASH [*brusquely*]. Where is the man of the house?

REBA. I am the man of the house.

ARASH [*pulling out a knife*]. Do not play tricks on me, please. I have no time to say words with you. Where is your husband or father or someone——

REBA. My father is dead.

ARASH. Your husband?

REBA. There are no men here.

ARASH. No men? [*Relaxes and puts knife away.*]

REBA. Don't get any ideas. Now what do you want?

ARASH [*starting quietly to explain, but becoming more excited as he goes along*]. You must help me. [*Moving C, but*

glancing back L now and then.] If they find me, they will kill me.

REBA. What are you talking about? . . . You're a foreigner, aren't you?

ARASH. My name is Arash. Help me, please.

REBA. You're wet. Take off your coat and I'll dry it. And leave your knife in your pocket. I've seen fish knives before, and I'm not frightened. . . . There's coffee here.

ARASH. There is no time for coffee. I tell you they'll be here soon.

REBA. Who?

ARASH. The secret police. [REBA looks at him incredulously. Then she goes to window, looks out and comes left of him.]

REBA. What is this, anyway? . . . You're not from around here. How'd you get 'way out here? We're miles from the village. You didn't walk along the cliff?

ARASH. No.

REBA. Only a fool would try that at night.

ARASH [*crossing quickly to window, peering out*]. Please believe me. I came by the water—I'm off a ship.

REBA. None of our ships are around here now. I know them all.

ARASH. Not one of yours. One of ours. . . . How do you say it here? Behind the Iron Curtain? Well, there is one of our ships lying off there now.

REBA. We don't have foreign ships in these waters. That's ridiculous! [*Moves toward ARASH. He recoils.*] You are frightened, aren't you?

ARASH. You don't know what it's like. Working in a stinking ship. The noise in the dark. Wondering what's going to happen next. [REBA moves to cupboard, gets a cup, then pours him a cup of coffee from pot on stove.]

REBA [*thoughtfully*]. We saw some lights off there tonight.

ARASH [*who has moved back toward table R C*]. You do believe me! . . . Listen. A fishing boat is anchored out there now. It is from the Baltic. . . . I got away in a rubber boat. You will find it on the beach below here behind a big rock. . . . Then I saw the light shining through the window.

{REBA *has crossed down to him with cup of coffee; she hands it to ARASH.*}

REBA. But why are you here?

ARASH [*as he takes an occasional gulp of hot coffee*]. I cannot go back. They will stop at nothing. . . . You see, I have planned this for years. I am a fisherman. I have fished off the Grand Banks—so near to America that I could see the buildings. And I have lived for this time. To jump ship, reach shore and turn myself over to your government. But this is the first time it has happened. They are always afraid we will leave if we get the chance. So I get away—and while we are talking, they will be climbing the cliff looking for me. [*Moves D R restlessly, leaving coffee cup on table.*]

REBA. What will they do to you if they catch you?

ARASH. It would be better if you did not know. . . . Now you must help me get to your village.

REBA [*moving L C and looking at him speculatively*]. I don't think I believe a word you say. . . . But you can sit by the fire awhile.

ARASH [*astounded*]. You don't believe me?

REBA [*starting toward him*]. Look here, Aram.

ARASH. Arash.

REBA. Arash, then. My name is Reba. Now you look here. I know the waters around here as well as any man. I've been fishing ever since I was little—with my father. And when he died, well, someone had to do it. . . . I know there are Russian ships, and ships from Iceland, but they don't come anywhere near us. Why, we're only a couple of miles from the mainland.

ARASH [*moving past her, to D L C*]. Telephone your police force, then. They will know what to do.

REBA. We don't have a telephone here.

ARASH. No telephone?

REBA. We're five miles from the village through rocks and scrub pine.

ARASH. Then help me get away.

REBA [*moving toward him*]. In this weather?

ARASH. I must take the chance.

REBA. Do you have a gun?

ARASH [*spreading out his hands*]. I have no gun. You see me as I am. A man without a gun. A man without a country now.

REBA [*after brief pause*]. Then I could stop you if I wanted to.

ARASH [*bitterly*]. Perhaps they were right, after all.

REBA. What do you mean?

ARASH. You Americans think only of yourselves. You have never seen one of our ships off your island—therefore, such a thing cannot happen. You have never seen a hunted man before—therefore, such a thing cannot happen. At least not in your world!

REBA. You must admit—

ARASH. I have talked enough. It does no good. [*Starts for door L.*]

REBA [*a struggle going on in her mind*]. Wait! If there is anyone outside— Come with me. [*Motions him toward door U R. ARASH follows her U R.*]

[*Then the door L opens, and ARASH and REBA whirl around. LAZAR comes in. He is an older man in his late thirties. Although physically not impressive, he has a quiet, forceful manner. He speaks with a slight accent.*]

LAZAR. May I come in, Miss Reba?

REBA [*startled*]. How do you know my name?

LAZAR. There isn't much that I don't know about you. [*Comes L C.*] This young man led me a merry chase up the cliffside. At my age, it is almost too much.

ARASH [*still near door U R with REBA*]. Then perhaps I can finish you off right now.

LAZAR [*condescending throughout his early speeches*]. But how would that look to Miss Reba? Right now she is thinking of the poor boy escaping from tyranny. She would be appalled if you were to murder me. Eh, Miss Reba?

ARASH [*coming D R*]. You are too clever for me, Lazar.

LAZAR. I hope so. Indeed I do. Besides, I don't think you have a gun with you.

ARASH. Why do you say that?

LAZAR. If you were picked up by the local police, a gun would not put you in their good graces. Yes, Arash, you, too, are clever in your way. But I do not think that the young lady was entirely taken in by your story. [*Puts his hand in his pocket. ARASH stiffens.*] Oh, I will not shoot. Not until I must. [*Takes a card case out and holds it toward REBA, who crosses down to him.*]

REBA [*looking from case to LAZAR*]. It says here that you are an FBI man.

LAZAR. Not FBI exactly. But something similar.

ARASH. Don't believe him! This is Lazar. The worst of them. [*Flings his arm out toward LAZAR.*] Look how he smiles. He sees me as good as dead right now. He's after me, I tell you!

LAZAR. Oh, you're right about that, Arash. I am after you.

REBA [*handing back card case*]. You don't talk like an American.

LAZAR [*smiling*]. I'm afraid you haven't heard much of Brooklyn crossed with a bit of the Balkans. That's from my parents, of course. [*Abruptly.*] But we must have no nonsense here. This man is far too dangerous. I must use your telephone.

REBA. We don't have a telephone here. [*LAZAR looks astonished. REBA is suspicious.*] If you know so much about us, you should have known that, too.

LAZAR [*recovering himself*]. I know that you are alone—three women. But the telephone. They didn't brief me on that. It complicates matters. Some heads will roll.

REBA. But not yours, Mr. Lazar.

LAZAR. I hope not. I sincerely hope not, young lady. It will be more difficult, that is all.

REBA. He says he's off a foreign ship. [*Looks over at ARASH.*]

LAZAR. That is quite true.

REBA. Then—