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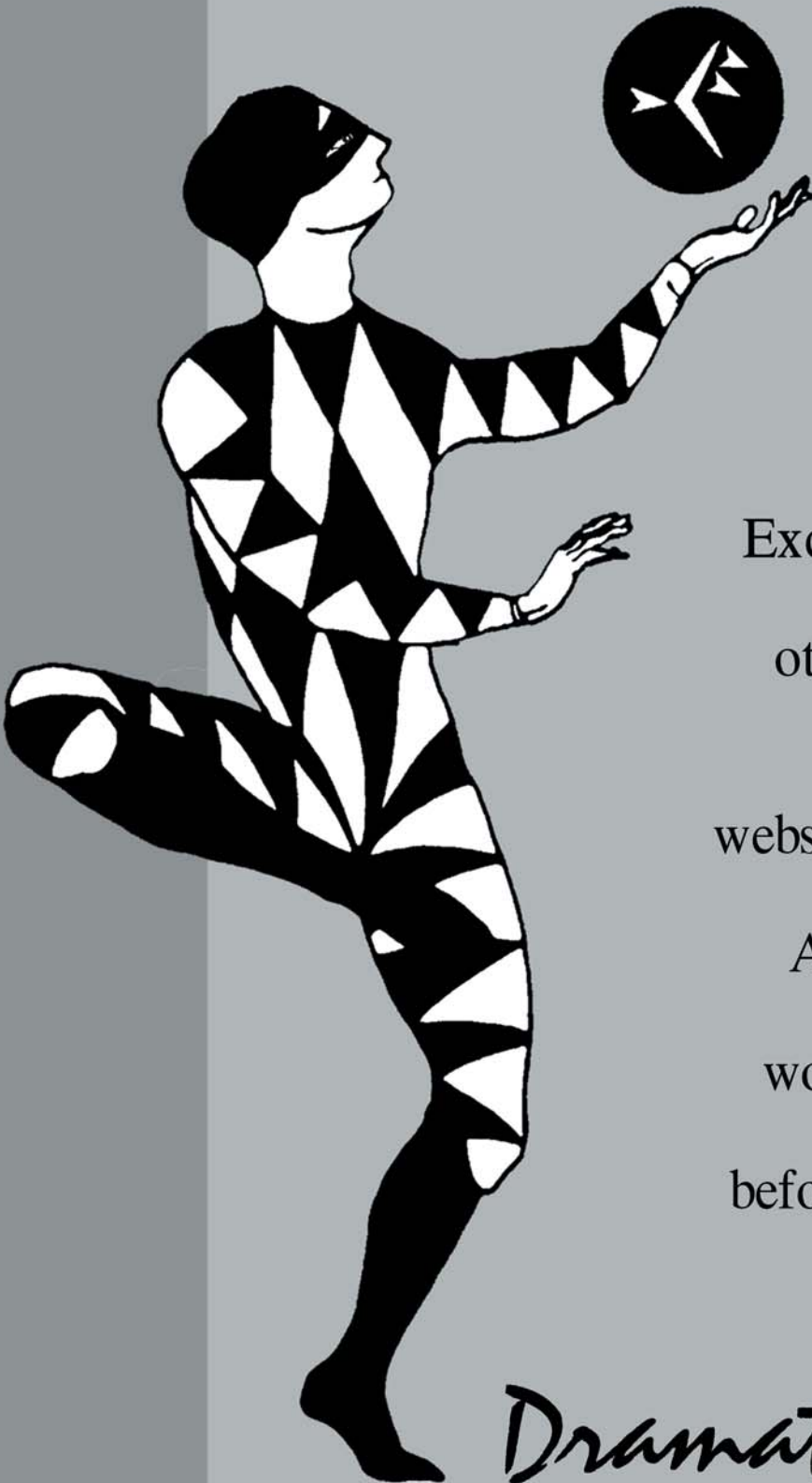
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*Dramatic Publishing*



A Play in One Act  
by  
ROBERT BROME

# Judgment Morning



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(JUDGMENT MORNING)

Adapted from the author's radio play "JUDGMENT MORNING," presented on the Trans-Canada Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Produced in Toronto and directed by Hector MacFadyen.

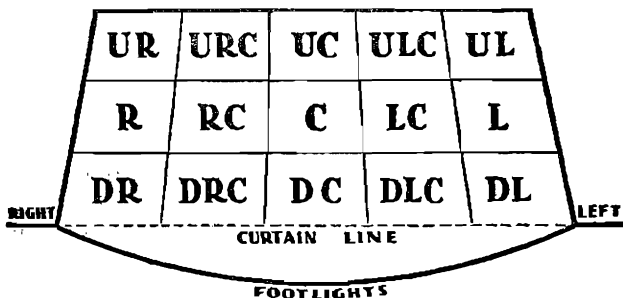
### CAST

ELLA .....	<i>Susan Fletcher</i>
BESSIE .....	<i>Nina Cloten</i>
CLAUDE .....	<i>Hugh Webster</i>

"JUDGMENT MORNING" appeared on A TOUCH OF STRANGE, a half-hour sustaining series of the CBC-Radio Network.

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## 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.

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**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.

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# Judgment Morning

*A Play in One Act*

FOR ONE MAN AND THREE WOMEN

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## CHARACTERS

ELLA KEMBALL.....*a wealthy spinster*  
BESSIE KEMBALL.....*her sister*  
CLAUDE KEMBALL.....*their brother*  
SADIE BIXLER.....*a neighbor*

PLACE: *The front room of the Kemball home in a small Mid-western town.*

TIME: *A windy, bleak January morning. Fifteen minutes before ten o'clock.*

NOTE: This play could take place in any year between 1920 and the present year. Costumes and furnishings necessarily will match the era decided upon by the director, and may be as simple or as elaborate as desired.

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## PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Curtains at window, pictures on walls, framed portrait photograph on wall U C, small stand holding family Bible, sofa, small gas heater, armchair, table and lamp, rocker, desk, straight chair, wastebasket. On desk: calendar-clock, official-looking paper, pen and other accessories; strongbox in a lower drawer of desk; receipts in desk drawer; two legal documents in drawer.

BESSIE: Bundle of soiled bedclothes, loaf of homemade bread.

## 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.

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# Judgment Morning

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SCENE: *The "front room" of a middle-class home in a small town in a remote corner of the Middle West. Downstage, in the wall R, is a large window with pull-back curtains at either side; upstage in the same wall is a door leading to the front porch. An archway is found in the rear wall, left of center. D L is a door leading to the kitchen. Pictures are on the walls; the framed photo-enlargement U C happens to be one of an unpleasant-looking older man wearing a generous mustache—also a scowl. Furniture onstage includes a small stand holding a huge family Bible—this D R against the wall R. Next to it, and adjacent to the window, is an aging sofa. A small gas heater (the size and type that could fit into a fireplace) stands at C near the rear wall. Downstage and right of it reposes a Windsor chair, with a table containing a lamp at the chair's right arm. Downstage and left of the gas heater is a Windsor rocker. An old desk has been placed against the upstage section of the wall L. On it is a calendar-clock, whose face cannot readily be seen from the audience. A common chair is downstage from the desk.*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: ELLA KEMBALL, *in a faded house dress and button-down sweater, is seated at the desk U L, working on something that looks like an official paper. She is thin, haggard, flat-chested. ELLA is only thirty-seven, but could easily be mistaken for forty-seven, or older. Off R is the eerie wail of winter wind, which continues—in varying degrees—throughout play.*]

ELLA [*affixing signature to document*]. Ella . . . Shane . . . Kemball. There . . . Date? [*Looks toward calendar-clock.*] Let's see—today'd be . . . [*Is puzzled.*] Friday? January sixteenth? Why, it—it's only Wednesday. Wednesday, the fourteenth! Something wrong. [*Rises, steps to archway U L*



c.] Bessie! You been fiddling with my calendar-clock, after I told you never to touch it again? Wound it too tight? Dropped it, maybe? You with that quivering wrist? [*Getting no answer, she calls again.*] Bessie!

[BESSIE, ELLA's younger sister, enters at arch U L C, wearing a bedraggled cotton dress of dubious vintage, a bundle of soiled bedclothes in her hand. She is drawn-looking, fluttery, birdlike, lovable, with a slight tremor in her right hand.]

BESSIE [*still in archway, pointing D R toward window, nervously excited*]. Why, there's going to be services over at MacMannigal's Funeral Parlor this morning. Saw from our bedroom winda. [*Crosses R toward window.*] People going in now. Who died, Ella?

ELLA [*moving R, toward C*]. What I'd rather know is who's been handling my calendar-clock.

BESSIE [*much absorbed in activities at mortuary off R*]. Funeral prob'ly starting at ten. [*Glances at clock.*] Just about have time to slip into my good dress. . . . Bound to be somebody we know. . . . [*Hesitantly.*] Could I, Ella? . . .

ELLA. You know my rule: no more fun'rals. Maybe teach you to slip off to Sadie Bixler's every chance you get. [*Glancing toward kitchen L.*] Water must be hot in that boiler now. All the towels and pillow cases rounded up, Bessie, for the warsh?

BESSIE [*glancing at bedclothes in her hand, then looking at ELLA, timid but insistent*]. If we expect folks to pay 'tention to *our* dead, we gotta pay some 'tention to *theirs*, Ella. [*Glances out window.*] Sadie'll be going, for sure.

ELLA. Wished you was as faithful to your house chores as you are to that snoopy, trouble-making Sadie Bixler. Forgot to open our bedroom winda last night, didn't you? There we was, both sleepin', place shut up tight as a tomb. [*Points upstage.*] And us with that gas heater.

[CLAUDE appears in arch U L C. He is twenty-four but looks



ELLA [*smugly*]. When did you eat last, Claude? Seen Hal-  
lowe'en ghosts that had a healthier color. Done best staying  
and working for Papa on them farms.

CLAUDE [*uneasily*]. Where—where is he? Papa——

BESSIE [*fingers moving toward her throat*]. Oh, Claude! [ELLA  
*crosses R toward window, slowly.*]

ELLA [*after a pause*]. He's in the graveyard. Papa's dead.

CLAUDE [*stunned*]. Dead? . . . [Turns to BESSIE, who nods  
*tearfully.*] When?

ELLA [*at window, her back still to CLAUDE*]. 'Way last sum-  
mer. Had a stroke. In the oat field. [Turns.] Work you  
should have been out there doing for him.

BESSIE [*mournfully*]. Claude, we—we didn't know where to  
get in touch with yuh——

CLAUDE [*moving several steps upstage, looking up at Papa's  
picture*]. I—I'd have come back for the funeral. . . .

ELLA. Maybe you would. *Maybe* . . .

BESSIE. Such a thing to say, Ella!

ELLA. Papa got mighty bitter, this last time you run off.

CLAUDE [*turning slowly*]. I was pretty bitter at Papa.

ELLA. Maybe paid you to treated him good—real good—  
carried him around on a feather cushion.

CLAUDE. Like you did?

BESSIE [*interrupting hesitantly*]. P-Papa left Ella all three  
farms . . .

CLAUDE. What? All three farms? [Turns.] To you?

BESSIE. And this house.

ELLA [*settling on sofa R*]. Papa made out a new will. Couldn't  
blame him, could you, Claude?

CLAUDE [*moving R a step*]. I—I'll just bust that new will!

ELLA. Save your trouble. Will's all settled up. Permanent.

CLAUDE [*moving R toward ELLA belligerently*]. We'll see  
about that. We'll see, Ella. Oh, you think you've maneuvered  
something, don't you—something *sly* and *tricky* and *big*!

ELLA. Nothing of the kind. Just doin' what I promised Papa  
before he died. Holding onto all three farms till Bessie  
gets over her—her mind trouble. And till you straighten up

and prove you can stay out there and farm your share of land. *And* keep it in the Kemball name. Instead of lettin' it melt away, loafing, gambling—you and that no-account crony Tom MacMannigal.

CLAUDE. Yeah. . . . You'll hold 'em—those farms—right in your fist—long as you're alive!

ELLA. Guess it shouldn't bother you, at that. Too *good* for farming, Claude—always too good. Mamma said you was so bright and smart and clever. Oughta go to high school—learn to be a lawyer. You was going so far in the world. So *far*!

CLAUDE [*turning toward C*]. Still going to study law.

ELLA. Twenty-four years old and gonna study law? Using what for money?

CLAUDE. Money I get from selling my farm!

ELLA. You ain't got a farm. Ain't got one yet—by no means—

CLAUDE [*bitterly*]. Wasted them long, miserable years out on that land . . . Papa yipping at my heels . . . me hatin' those cattle and plows and thrashing machines! [*Turns toward ELLA again.*] Earned my share—more than earned it! [*Moves R toward her.*] And I'll get it—*get it*, Ella—if I have to—to run *somebody* through with a butcher knife!

ELLA [*rising, shaken*]. Don't talk like that. Bad luck! [*Points toward Papa's picture.*] How many times we heard Papa say that just making a idle threat is tempting the Clutches of Death into the house?

BESSIE [*still in doorway D L*]. Mercy, no, Claude. Mustn't talk so awful. Didn't Mamma raise us by that Bible over there? [*Points to Bible on stand D R.*]

CLAUDE. Guess cheating a brother and a sister was what Ella found in the Bible!

ELLA [*crossing L in direction of BESSIE*]. Ain't cheating nobody. Made Papa a sacred promise, him on his deathbed.

BESSIE [*eyes narrowing a little*]. You—you think we're bein' cheated, Claude?

ELLA. Claude always did have a wild 'magination. [*To*

BESSIE.] Come, Bessie. Time to get that boiling water dipped out and your warsh started, on the back porch. [*Turning.*] All them sidewalks gotta be scooped, Claude. Snow practically hip-deep. Stay at my house, you'll have to work.

CLAUDE [*belligerently, moving a step L*]. Your house—*your* house——

ELLA [*smugly*]. Papa's house.

CLAUDE [*threateningly*]. You just remember what I say, Ella! *I'll get my share!* And Bessie'll get hers! Won't live and die your bondservants!

ELLA. Bondservants? Huh! I'd call it star boarders!

BESSIE [*hurt and somewhat angry, sighing*]. 'Fore I start the warsh, guess I better fix Claude that breakfast. [*She goes out D L.*]

ELLA [*in doorway to kitchen D L*]. Suppose you could leave, Claude, if you feel so abused—go seek your fortune again. The way you done them four other times. Won't hold you here, if you're gonna fume and fret. . . .

[*BESSIE re-enters hastily D L.*]

BESSIE. Ella! Went to get the bacon slab off the back porch, and—and I found two cardboard boxes out there—big boxes—one with our good silverware, other with the best china dishes! Like we was *moving*! You pack them, Ella?

ELLA. Silver and china? [*Sighs loudly.*] You're seeing things again, Bessie. Thought your mind was better these last months. Getting worse, instead.

BESSIE. Silver and china *both*! Go look for yourself! M-maybe my mind's better than you ever 'magine! [*Realizing what she has said, she pulls more closely within her shell.*] Know one thing—— We coulda had bugglars in the night, and they—all of a sudden—mighta got scared away. Better see if your strongbox is still there in the desk.

ELLA. Oh, Bessie.

CLAUDE [*moving R toward window*]. Be ripe for all sorts of trouble—you the richest old maid in the county. Thieves,

murderers, conniving bachelors— [ELLA *moves upstage to desk and takes strongbox from a lower drawer.*]

ELLA [*as she proceeds to try the strongbox*]. Hate to disappoint you, Claude, but— [Gives a start.] Wh-why, it's open. Strongbox's been pried open!

BESSIE [*moving upstage toward ELLA*]. It has? . . .

ELLA [*stunned*]. Everything gone! Important papers—insurance policies—four hundred dollars cash I was saving to pay my taxes with!

BESSIE [*crossing R to C*]. Ella! Them bugglars mighta—mighta murdered us in our sleep!

ELLA [*turning slowly toward CLAUDE*]. I didn't steal my own tax money. And Bessie sure enough didn't. No wonder you come soft-toeing in so quiet last night. Mighta had a reason.

CLAUDE [*sitting on sofa R*]. Oh, of course. I swiped the four hundred. Wanted to buy higher-priced cigarette paper and tobacco. Gonna light my smokes this morning with your receipts and insurance policies.

BESSIE. Claude wouldn't thief off his own sister, Ella . . . his own blood sister! [*She is at C.*]

CLAUDE. My own blood sister thieved off *me*—off you, too, Bessie. *Stole us totally blind!*

ELLA [*crossing R to C*]. All right, Claude, just for that, you can get out. Pack your duds and get out! Tired of you leeching and stealing, and—and threatening my life!

CLAUDE. My house and Bessie's, much as it is yours.

ELLA. But I got the deed. Sheriff'll back me up.

CLAUDE [*rising slowly*]. You—you mean this?

ELLA. Yes, I mean it. And don't you never again come crawling back, middle of the night, or otherwise.

BESSIE [*left of ELLA*]. Ellllaaa! Claude's our brother—our baby brother!

ELLA. Sick of my baby brother. Sick to the gills!

BESSIE [*quaveringly*]. Maybe . . . maybe you're sick of . . . me . . .

ELLA. Maybe . . . maybe, Bessie!

BESSIE [*hurt*]. Suppose, Claude, us—us both oughta pack?

CLAUDE. Ella, I couldn't take care of Bessie. You know that—

BESSIE [*comfortingly*]. Don't you worry, Claude. We'll get along. Always wanted to open a little millin'ry shop—sew hats and sell them. Pretty good with a needle and scissor, spite of this tremble in my hand.

ELLA. Open a hat store, on the four hundred dollars Claude took from my strongbox?

CLAUDE. I'll leave, but—but Bessie's got to stay here with you. Please, Ella.

ELLA. You take her for a while. See what I been putting up with. Twelve years. Twelve years is a long time.

BESSIE [*crossing R and taking CLAUDE gently by the arm*]. You'll see, Claude, once I get all them pretty hats made and in our shop winda. [*Leads him U L C toward archway to bedrooms.*] Come along, Claude. First, we'll pack. Then there just might still be time to slip in at that funeral—you and me. I hate to miss a single funeral. [*She and CLAUDE are making exit U L C at arch.*] So sad when just a handful's at a funeral . . . [*They have disappeared U L C.* ELLA, now alone on the stage, reveals that she repents her impulsive action, insofar at least as BESSIE is concerned. She paces R toward window, turns, moves restlessly upstage toward U R area. ELLA sinks into chair U R, misery written on her face, twisting and untwisting her fingers. Finally, she rises, moves slowly, reluctantly, toward arch.]

ELLA [*starting to call*]. Bes— [*Hesitates.*] No. No—I won't. [*Moves downstage and R.*]

[*BESSIE appears in arch U L C.*]

BESSIE [*upset*]. Can't find my good dress, Ella, in the wardrobe, there in our bedroom. Jersey dress ain't nowhere. Started packing a suitcase and—

ELLA [*deciding to back down, after all*]. Bessie, may—maybe I said something a minute ago—something that just slipped off a sharp tongue . . .