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Dramatic Publishing



Bernice Bobs Her Hair

A One-Act Play

Adapted from the classic
short story of F. Scott Fitzgerald

by D. D. Brooke



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

Bernice Bobs Her Hair

Comedy. Based on the story by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Dramatized by D D Brooke.

Cast: 7m., 6w., extras. F. Scott Fitzgerald, the foremost chronicler of the 1920s, created this classic short story of young people, their charm and underlying sadness. Bernice, an insecure young woman of 18, is visiting her popular cousin Marjorie. At a series of country club dances, Bernice is, at first, a wallflower. Marjorie tries to help her gain popularity and succeeds beyond the wildest expectations of either girl. When Bernice wins Yale man Warren away from Marjorie, Marjorie exacts a terrible revenge. Bernice, learning from the experience, turns the tables in a surprise ending. *Area staging.*

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D.D. BROOKE

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F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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(BERNICE BOBS HER HAIR)

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The set for the Midwest Country Club can be as simple as a bare, curtained stage or as elaborate as you like. There are small gold chairs around the edge of the dance floor and the set can be further dressed with potted palms and a chandelier. Downstage left, a few flats or screens suggest a powder room. This small area is divided by a screen perpendicular to the footlights. The area right of the screen is a little foyer. Left of the screen there is a little, mirrored dressing table and a stool. Balancing this, downstage right, there is a small platform, a low railing on the downstage side which extends into the wings, representing the porch of the club. On the left side of the porch an easel stands. At its top a permanent sign reads, "The COUNTRY CLUB Presents" and below it there is a removable card. The changing of these removable cards will indicate the passage of time.

All of the young people are dressed as much as possible in the style of the 1920's. All of the girls have long hair.

BERNICE BOBS HER HAIR

After the house lights go down, we hear a romantic popular tune of the 1920's. (It can be recorded or live.)

THE CURTAIN RISES on the dance floor of a Midwest Country Club. Most of the young people in the play are dancing the fox trot. One couple is sitting the dance out at R. DRAYCOTT DEYO, a boy of eighteen, is talking quietly with MARTHA CAREY and ROBERTA DILLON, at L. After a beat, MRS. HARVEY and MRS. DEYO, two mothers, saunter on UR and wander downstage, closely observing the dancers and the dance. As they reach the downstage area, the sound of the music fades down, but not out, and the dance continues as the ladies talk.

MRS. HARVEY. Charming, isn't it?

MRS. DEYO (doubtfully). Well . . . personally I find the waltz and the polka acceptable, but these modern dances . . . ? You know, Mrs. Harvey, when the young set dances, it is often with the worst intentions. Particularly in the summer.

MRS. HARVEY. Really, Mrs. Deyo, I don't think . . .

MRS. DEYO. One must be ever vigilant. On the dance floor and certainly in the parking lot!

MRS. HARVEY. Oh, Mrs. Deyo, they're a nice bunch of youngsters. Why, your son . . .

MRS. DEYO (placing him above suspicion). Draycott is studying

for the ministry. He's talking to those two girls. (She waves at DRAYCOTT across the dance floor. He waves back.) Doubtless, he is waiting for a waltz.

MRS. HARVEY (who finds Draycott a bore). Doubtless.

(MARTHA and ROBERTA leave DRAYCOTT and go into the powder room. One sits at the dressing table, the other stands behind her and they touch up their hair.)

MRS. DEYO (philosophically). There are so many temptations for the young today, Mrs. Harvey. All these young boys with their own automobiles . . . and there are girls in this very town . . . would you believe it? . . . who have bobbed their hair!

MRS. HARVEY. When we were girls . . .

MRS. DEYO. We would never have been permitted such liberties. I don't know what the world is coming to, do you?

MRS. HARVEY. No.

MRS. DEYO. Take Warren McIntyre . . .

MRS. HARVEY. He's dancing with my daughter, Marjorie. Over there in the blue [or whatever color the dress is] dress. (She nods in the direction of MARJORIE, a pretty eighteen-year-old dancing with good-looking WARREN, nineteen.)

MRS. DEYO. He was such a sweet little boy. I don't approve of his family sending him East to college. Yale can give a young man dangerous ideas.

MRS. HARVEY (a bit frosty). I don't think Warren is dangerous.

MRS. DEYO. I'm sure if Marjorie dances with him, he is quite acceptable.

(DRAYCOTT moves to WARREN, taps his shoulder. WARREN releases MARJORIE, who begins to dance with DRAYCOTT. WARREN goes R and stops a moment with the couple there. MRS. DEYO continues through this action.)

MRS. DEYO. Marjorie is a lovely girl . . . and so is your niece. Isn't that her dancing with Otis Ormonde? (She nods toward BERNICE, a tall girl of eighteen, pretty but not as well put together as Marjorie. BERNICE is dancing with OTIS, a short, younger boy of sixteen.)

MRS. HARVEY. Yes, that's Bernice.

MRS. DEYO. Charming. So refined. Which is ever so much more acceptable than being popular. (WARREN begins to walk to the porch.) Will she be visiting you long?

MRS. HARVEY. Just the month of August.

MRS. DEYO (impulsively). I should like to give a little dinner for her.

MRS. HARVEY. I'm sure she'd be very pleased.

(The music stops. The dancers applaud, couples break up. BERNICE goes into the powder room, passing MARTHA and ROBERTA, who come out. BERNICE sits at the little table, combing her hair. The young people talk quietly among themselves. WARREN reaches MRS. HARVEY and MRS. DEYO.)

MRS. HARVEY. Good evening, Warren.

WARREN (taking out a cigarette case). Mrs. Harvey, Mrs. Deyo. Just thought I'd go out on the porch for a smoke. (He smiles at them, moves off to the porch where he tries, inexpertly, to light a cigarette.)

MRS. DEYO (reacting to the cigarette as WARREN leaves). Oh! Yale! (MARJORIE, seeing WARREN go to the porch, follows him.)

MRS. HARVEY. Perhaps we should have a lemonade?

MRS. DEYO (tensely). Yes. Yes. I think I need one. (They exit UR. WARREN gets his cigarette lit just as MARJORIE reaches the porch.)

MARJORIE. Warren . . . (WARREN coughs, turns, sees MARJORIE, holds up his cigarette and apologizes for it.)

WARREN. Excuse me. (He drops it and stamps it out.)

MARJORIE (wheedling). Warren . . . do something for me? Dance with Bernice! She's been stuck with little Otis Ormonde for almost an hour.

WARREN (unhappy). Sure . . . but . . . (Bluntly.) . . . When is she going back to Eau Claire?

MARJORIE (petulantly). You don't like her!

WARREN. Oh, she's fine. She doesn't have much to say – not after she talks about the weather. I wonder what she'd do if anyone said anything . . . you know . . . personal to her.

MARJORIE. Don't you dare!

WARREN. Not much chance. Look, Marjorie, since she's been here . . . I haven't gotten to see much of you. . . . (Reminding her of his own desirability.) I'll be going back to . . . Yale . . . soon. (Every time he says "Yale" he seems to put quotation marks around the word.)

MARJORIE (wheedling, straightening his tie coquettishly). Oh, I know, Warren. But she is my cousin and my guest and I've got to see she has a nice time . . . find boys for her to dance with and all . . .

WARREN. I'll dance with her.

MARJORIE. You don't mind, do you? I'll see that you don't get stuck.

WARREN. It's all right.

MARJORIE. She's in the powder room.

(WARREN nods and starts toward the powder room. Meanwhile, OTIS moves to G. REECE STODDARD, twenty-two, at Harvard Law School, and CHARLEY PAULSON, nineteen and shy, who are near the powder room.)

G. REECE (teasing OTIS). Hey, short stuff, where's your dance partner? I hate to see you separated. You look so swell on the floor.

OTIS. She's in there, fixing her hair. I'm waiting to dance

another hour with her. (The boys laugh.) Why don't some of you cut in? Bernice likes more variety.

CHARLEY. Why, Otis, you've just barely got used to her.

OTIS. What's worse, Charley, I think she's getting used to me.

(They laugh again.) There's only one thing I can see to do . . . (He whirls and picks up one of the small chairs.)

WARREN (joining the boys). Why the chair, Otis?

OTIS. Oh, this? I'm going to use it like the animal trainers in the circus. When Bernice comes out of the powder room, I'm going to force her back in. (They laugh again.)

WARREN. Never mind, Otis. I'm relieving you.

OTIS (melodramatically, pressing the chair on WARREN). You may need this, old man.

(The music begins again. OTIS and G. REECE move on to ROBERTA and MARTHA and begin dancing with them. Other couples dance. MARJORIE talks to someone at L. WARREN waits in front of the powder room as BERNICE comes out.)

BERNICE. Oh, Warren!

WARREN. Would you care to dance, Bernice?

BERNICE. Well . . . if you put down that chair.

WARREN (embarrassed). Of course. (He sets the chair down and they begin to dance downstage. WARREN can think of nothing to say. At last, desperately:) Ahhh . . .

BERNICE. Yes?

WARREN (deflated). Nothing.

BERNICE (struggling for a topic, finally). It's hotter here than in Eau Claire.

WARREN. Is that so?

BERNICE. Yes. (Neither can think of anything else.)

(MRS. DEYO and MRS. HARVEY re-enter UR.)

MRS. DEYO. I see your niece is dancing with Warren. I hope he doesn't set her afire with his cigarette.

MRS. HARVEY. I'm sure she'll be safe. Excuse me. (She walks across upstage and down to powder room, sits down at the table. MRS. DEYO sits down in UR area.)

WARREN (still trying). You going to be here much longer?

BERNICE. Till eleven. That's when the dance is over.

WARREN. I mean in town.

BERNICE. Oh.

WARREN. Will you be?

BERNICE. Another week. (They dance a few more steps and she tries.) What kind of automobile do you have?

WARREN. I have a Stutz Bearcat. (Another beat of silence.) What kind of automobile do you have?

BERNICE. I have a Pierce Arrow.

WARREN. Oh. (MARJORIE goes into powder room.)

BERNICE. Then we both have automobiles. Isn't that a coincidence?

WARREN (bored out of his mind). What would happen if . . . (He suddenly stops dancing and decides to risk a "personal remark.") You know what else you have?

BERNICE (nervous). What?

WARREN. You have a very kissable mouth!

BERNICE (shocked). Oh! (She doesn't know what to say or do. The music stops.) Excuse me. I think I left my comb in the powder room. (Upset, she walks quickly to the powder room, stopping right of the screen when she hears MARJORIE and MRS. HARVEY on the other side.)

MARJORIE. Oh, but, Mother, she's absolutely hopeless.

MRS. HARVEY. I just saw her dancing with Warren.

MARJORIE. I forced him to. (BERNICE, not wanting to hear this, starts back out of the powder room, changes her mind and moves closer to the screen to listen.)

MRS. HARVEY. She's pretty and sweet. And her mother says she's a very good cook.

MARJORIE. What of it? Men don't like her.

MRS. HARVEY. What's a little cheap popularity?

MARJORIE. It's everything when you're eighteen. I've done my best. I've been polite and I've made men dance with her but she bores them.

MRS. HARVEY. A little boredom is good for a boy's character.

MARJORIE. I've tried to drop hints about her clothes and things and then she looks furious. She's smart enough to know she's a wall flower. I bet she consoles herself by thinking she's virtuous and I'll come to a bad end.

MRS. HARVEY. Now, Marjorie . . .

MARJORIE. And you know what? I bet she'd give ten years of her life and her Pierce Arrow to have three or four men in love with her and be cut in on every few seconds at a dance.

MRS. HARVEY. Well, I know Bernice isn't very vivacious, but still . . .

MARJORIE. Vivacious! She's about as vivacious as a cigar store Indian.

MRS. HARVEY (rising). I should get back to Mrs. Deyo. (Realizing that MRS. HARVEY is coming out, BERNICE starts out of the powder room.) She likes Bernice enough to give a dinner for her. (MARJORIE comes in front of the screen just in time to see BERNICE go.)

MARJORIE. Oh!

MRS. HARVEY (also seeing). I better say something . . . (BERNICE is walking quickly toward the porch.)

MARJORIE. My fault. I'll do it. (She goes after BERNICE.)

(The music starts and couples begin to dance. MRS. HARVEY goes around the back to MRS. DEYO, then they exit UR. MARJORIE passes WARREN.)

WARREN. Want to dance, Marjorie?

MARJORIE. Just wait a minute, Warren. (She follows BERNICE onto the porch.) I'm sorry, Bernice.

BERNICE. I just went into the powder room. I didn't mean to listen . . . at first. (**MARJORIE** shrugs, then turns away.) I guess I'd better go back to Eau Claire . . . if I'm such a nuisance. (She waits for **MARJORIE** to say something. **MARJORIE** brushes an invisible speck from her skirt.) I've tried to be nice and . . . no one ever visited me and was neglected and insulted like that!

MARJORIE. I . . . I promised Warren this dance.

BERNICE. Your friends don't like me. (**MARJORIE** takes a step toward the dance floor.) Of course I was furious last week when you hinted that that dress was unbecoming. Don't you think I know how to dress?

MARJORIE (half to herself). No.

BERNICE. What?

MARJORIE (turning to face **BERNICE**). I didn't hint anything. I said it was better to wear a becoming dress three nights straight than to alternate it with two frights.

BERNICE. Do you think that was a very nice thing to say?

MARJORIE. I wasn't trying to be nice. (She stares at **BERNICE** defiantly. After a beat:) When do you want to go?

BERNICE (shocked). Oh!

MARJORIE. Didn't you say you were going?

BERNICE. Yes, but . . .

MARJORIE. But you were only bluffing.

BERNICE (bursting into tears). You're my cousin. I'm . . . I'm visiting. I'm supposed to stay a month and if I go home my mother will know that . . . that . . .

MARJORIE. I'll give you my month's allowance. You can spend this last week anywhere you want. There's a very nice hotel . . .

BERNICE (pulling herself together). I'll get my railroad ticket. (She waits a beat.) If that's what you want . . .

MARJORIE. If you're not having a good time, might as well go. No use being miserable.

BERNICE. I just don't know what my mother will say.

MARJORIE. Our mothers are all very well in their way, but they know very little about their daughters' problems.

BERNICE (haughtily). Please don't talk about my mother.

MARJORIE. I'm not. I just don't think she understands what having you here is like.

BERNICE. Do you think you've treated me properly?

MARJORIE. I've done my best. You're difficult material to work with.

BERNICE. I think you're hard and selfish and you haven't a womanly quality in you!

MARJORIE. Don't tell me about the womanly woman. She's a weak, cowardly mass of affectations whose whole early life is occupied in whining criticisms of girls like me who have a good time.

BERNICE (shocked). What?

MARJORIE. There's some excuse for an ugly girl whining . . . but you! You're not ugly. You just don't know how to use what you've got. If you expect me to weep with you, you'll be disappointed. Go or stay, Bernice, as you like. Warren is waiting for me. (She starts to leave.)

BERNICE. Do you love Warren?

MARJORIE. No.

BERNICE. How do you know?

MARJORIE. I have my own infallible test.

BERNICE. Which is . . . ?

MARJORIE. When I'm away from him, I forget all about him and go out with other men.

BERNICE. You are hard and cold!

MARJORIE. I'm popular! (She again turns to go.)

BERNICE. Wait!

MARJORIE (turning back). Yes?

BERNICE (having difficulty saying it). Maybe . . . maybe you're right about things. Possibly not. But if you'll tell me why your friends aren't interested in me, I'll see if I can do what you want me to.

MARJORIE (moving back to her). Do you mean it?

BERNICE. Yes.

MARJORIE. Without reservations? Will you do exactly as I say?

BERNICE. Well . . . if they're sensible things.

MARJORIE. In your case, sensible things won't help! If I tell you to take boxing lessons, you'll have to do it. Write home and tell your mother you're staying another two weeks.

BERNICE. But what . . . ?

MARJORIE. Do you know why you're tense with men? Because you're never sure you look well. When a girl feels she's perfectly groomed and dressed she can forget that part of her. That's charm. The more parts of yourself you can afford to forget, the more charm you have.

BERNICE. Don't I look all right?

MARJORIE. Look at your eyebrows!

BERNICE (looking up). I can't.

MARJORIE. They're straggly. They'd be beautiful if you took care of them.

BERNICE. Do you mean to say that men notice eyebrows?

MARJORIE. They are there in the middle of your face!

BERNICE. I thought you despised dainty, feminine things like that.

MARJORIE. I hate dainty minds! But if a girl looks like a million dollars, she can talk about Russia or the League of Nations or ping pong and get away with it.

BERNICE. What else?

MARJORIE. Your dancing.

BERNICE. Don't I dance all right?

MARJORIE. No! You dance standing up straight like an ironing board. I suppose some little old lady once told you you looked dignified that way. But it makes a man drag you around the floor and the man is the one who counts.

BERNICE. Go on.

MARJORIE. You've got to learn to be nice to men who are sad birds. Like Otis. And Charley Paulson. Dull men are the

biggest part of any crowd. You want to be cut in on, they're the ones who'll do it. If enough sad birds ask you to dance, the attractive men will think they're missing something and they'll start to dance with you.

BERNICE. I see.

MARJORIE. And for goodness sake, stop talking about the weather and your car. Be surprising. You've either got to amuse people or feed 'em or shock 'em.

BERNICE. Did you make that up?

MARJORIE. No. I read it in Oscar Wilde but who's going to know the difference? Well? Are you going to stay? (BERNICE nods. MARJORIE stares at her speculatively.)

BERNICE. You're a peach to help me. (MARJORIE continues staring.) I know you don't like sentiment.

MARJORIE. Oh, I wasn't thinking about that. I was wondering whether we shouldn't bob your hair.

(BERNICE gasps. MARJORIE moves to the dance floor and joins WARREN. The music changes to a tango and the couples dance. A boy moves to the easel beside the terrace and removes the "Saturday Night Frolic" card. Beneath it another card reads, "Wednesday Night Revel." CHARLEY comes downstage and stands watching the dancers, his back to the audience. BERNICE sees him, comes down from the porch to his general area, waiting for him to ask her to dance. When he pays no attention, she does a few tango steps on her own. He still doesn't notice. At last she moves to him.)

BERNICE. Charley Paulson! (He turns, startled.) Do you think I ought to bob my hair, Mr. Charley Paulson?

CHARLEY (surprised at her asking him). Why?

BERNICE. Because I'm considering it. It's such a sure and easy way of attracting attention.

CHARLEY (nervous). I don't know much about hair. Bobbed hair. Most girls I know have unbobbed hair.