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Dramatic Publishing



THE ABDICATION

by
RUTH WOLFF



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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RUTH WOLFF

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(THE ABDICATION)

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For
Audrey Wood
and
Roger L. Stevens

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THE ABDICATION

A Play in Two Acts
For 6 Men and 4 Women

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

BIRGITO
DOMINIC
CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN
CARDINAL AZZOLINO
TINA
OXENSTIERNA
CHRIS
CHARLES
EBBA
MAGNUS

TIME: The main action of the play takes place in Rome
1655.

PLACE: An antechamber in the Vatican.

SETTING: A raked platform surrounded by vertical panels
which can rise, fall or pivot to create a space in which
scenes flow easily from present action to other places,
other times.

The setting should be abstract, less concerned with physical
reality than with evocation of character, mood and
state of mind.

THE ABDICATION

premiered at the Theatre Royal, Bath, England,
on May 26, 1971

It was produced by the Bristol Old Vic Company

By arrangement with Roger L. Stevens
and Donald Albery

It starred

Gemma Jones as Christina of Sweden
and

David Neal as Cardinal Azzolino

The cast included:

Deborah Grant, Yvonne Antrobus, Ronald McGill,
Pippa Steel, Tony Robinson, Ian Marter,
Christopher Strauli, Timothy Kightley

Production directed by Val May

Designed by Alexander McPherson

The American premiere was presented by the
Eureka Theatre, San Francisco

The play has been presented in most of the United States
with notable productions abroad including:

Il Gruppo Arte Drammatica (Italy)

De Haagse Comedie (Netherlands)

Théâtre de Quat'Sous (Montreal)

The Warner Bros. film starred

Liv Ullmann and Peter Finch

Directed by Anthony Harvey

Christina of Sweden has abdicated the throne and arrived in Rome to become, as she says, the Church's "newest and most ardent Catholic." The pope, however, doubts the motivations for her sudden conversion. He appoints Cardinal Azzolino to cross-examine her—a challenge she strongly resists. Gradually, Azzolino breaks down her resistance. Under his insistent questioning she confesses her innermost thoughts and feelings about matters political, personal, sexual, spiritual. When she has confessed all, he cries:

AZZOLINO. You *are* here under false colors! You came to Rome to set up a separate kingdom for yourself!

CHRISTINA (*waking from her visions*). What—?

AZZOLINO. You saw yourself on a raised dais, sitting next to the pope on an equal throne!

CHRISTINA. I didn't mean—

AZZOLINO. You *did* expect to be the queen of Rome. You still expect it! Once that door is opened to you, you expect to reign along with him!

(She looks at him, her eyes widening in horror and self-realization. Suddenly, she blurts out:)

CHRISTINA. Yes! It's true!

AZZOLINO. You came to Rome because there's no queen here to rival you!

CHRISTINA. It's true! It's true!

AZZOLINO. You joined the Catholic Church because—

CHRISTINA (*crying out helplessly*). —I didn't know what else to do!

AZZOLINO (*indicating the letters*). The accusations here—
are they false or true, Christina?

CHRISTINA (*wildly*). All false! All true! What do they say? I gave myself to men? Women? Dogs? (*Suddenly she looks at him directly and says deeply:*) I gave myself to no one! I have—never—loved! Not even God. (*She falls to the floor in deep contrition.*) Oh help me to come to Him. No one has ever loved me. Can He love me? ...Help me, Azzolino. I don't know what to do... (*She sobs, face to the ground in deep humility.*)

AZZOLINO. You have come to Him. You have confessed to Him. He will not turn away. (*He puts his hand over her head in benediction.*) God, grant peace of soul to your daughter, Christina. Look upon her with compassion, absolve her from all sin, bring her to Thy light... (*He touches her head.*) May the Lord bless you and keep you, may He cause His countenance to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may He lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

(*She rises, as if a great weight had been removed. After a long time, she speaks.*)

CHRISTINA. ...In this place, I have told you things I have never told another human being.

AZZOLINO. You were speaking *through* me to God—

CHRISTINA. ...What will you say when they ask you if Christina is worthy of being received into the church?

AZZOLINO (*a long silence*). ...I will answer—yes.

CHRISTINA. Do you really believe I am?

AZZOLINO. Sometimes God reveals His wonders slowly.

If you are not a true believer now, belief may come—

CHRISTINA. “May come—”!

AZZOLINO. It *will* come. I am certain!

CHRISTINA. In other words, you plan to lie, for my sake—

AZZOLINO. No. ...To give you the benefit of the doubt.

CHRISTINA. —because you have come to *care*—!

AZZOLINO. I care for your *soul*!

CHRISTINA. Never mind. I need no further declaration!

AZZOLINO. Christina, don’t misunderstand me—

CHRISTINA. Oh, this *is* the house of miracles! You needn’t say another word!

AZZOLINO. Christina! Stop!

CHRISTINA (*with joy*). I give you my full attention. My full mind. My full heart.

AZZOLINO. ...I want to admit you to the church, but you must help me.

CHRISTINA. In every way I can.

AZZOLINO. You must study the laws of the church.

CHRISTINA. If you will teach me.

AZZOLINO. You must do your best to live by them.

CHRISTINA. With all my heart.

AZZOLINO. Not flaunting them, not going against them—

CHRISTINA. Of course not.

AZZOLINO. ...Not asking others to go against them—

CHRISTINA. Azzolino, what are you trying to say?

AZZOLINO. Christina, this is very hard for me—

CHRISTINA. Go on—

AZZOLINO (*pause, with great difficulty*). ...You know the laws under which I live—

CHRISTINA. Some of them.

AZZOLINO. You know—I have vowed—to consecrate my life to the service of God.

CHRISTINA. I know.

AZZOLINO. Then you must realize that my thoughts—must always be with Him. That it is impossible for me to feel towards any other—the devotion that I owe to Him, or to accept from any other—such feelings towards me.

CHRISTINA. I don't understand you—

AZZOLINO. For me to even *listen* to what you have been saying is a serious violation of the rules I've sworn to live by.

CHRISTINA (*appalled*). What are you saying—?

AZZOLINO (*with gentleness and sympathy*). You must promise me, Christina, that if I admit you here—you will never again allow yourself to display to me—or to behave towards me—as you have been doing.

CHRISTINA (*anguished*). You dare propose such a bargain—?!

AZZOLINO. Christina—

CHRISTINA. You want me to stifle what I feel?!

AZZOLINO. There is no other way—

CHRISTINA (*a despairing cry*). But I have found my happiness in you!

AZZOLINO. You must find it in God. If you love the church—

CHRISTINA. I love the church because you brought me to it!

AZZOLINO. You cannot say that—!

CHRISTINA. But it's true! Has nothing happened between us during these hours? Have you no feelings for me?

AZZOLINO. You cannot ask that of a priest!

CHRISTINA. I ask it of *you*. I feel for *you*.

AZZOLINO. You cannot love me *and* the church!

CHRISTINA. But I do!

AZZOLINO. Then you must stop. Or if you cannot, then at least you must keep silent.

CHRISTINA. You want me to stop up my brain, my eyes, my mouth? Become once more the doll queen?

AZZOLINO. You must never speak of these things again!

CHRISTINA. You may find safety in lies, Cardinal Hypocrite. I do not.

AZZOLINO. Christina, if I vouch for you—will you behave?

CHRISTINA. What will you do if I don't? Burn me as you've burned so many others?

AZZOLINO. The church demands obedience!

CHRISTINA. The church demands a blind soul. Death in life.

AZZOLINO. It asks that those who wish its grace follow its commandments.

CHRISTINA. Do *you* believe in its commandments? Can *you*, a thinking, compassionate being, accept what it asks you to relinquish of free will, of life?

AZZOLINO (*in a rage*). Are you trying to separate me from my faith? Who are you, the devil?

CHRISTINA. Is that what you think—?

AZZOLINO. Christina, you know if you are not accepted here, no place will take you.

CHRISTINA. I know that.

AZZOLINO. You know your only chance for a life of dignity is here.

CHRISTINA. I know. I know.

AZZOLINO. Then in the name of heaven, help me to help you. Promise me that you will obey the laws of the church.

CHRISTINA. They ask too much!

AZZOLINO. If you want the church to bring you to God—

CHRISTINA. I don't need the church to bring me to God. I was *born* with Him within me!

AZZOLINO. If you want us to intercede for you with Him—

CHRISTINA. Why should you? I shall do as I've always done—speak directly to Him myself!

AZZOLINO. This is heresy!

CHRISTINA (*addressing heaven*). God— You and I are the best of friends, aren't we! Nothing, not even the church, can come between us!

AZZOLINO. If you want to be within this faith—

CHRISTINA. Let it receive me as I am or reject me—!

AZZOLINO. You must submit to its will!

CHRISTINA. I will not! I will love you if I choose! I defy the pope and the church and heaven!

AZZOLINO. You will not be admitted! Ever! As God is my witness, you will never be let in!

(AZZOLINO exits L in a fury. CHRISTINA manages to hold herself proudly erect until he has gone. Then she begins to sway—and collapses on the floor.

Above her unconscious form, TINA appears as in a vision.)

TINA. I am the most wonderful queen that Sweden has ever had! For one thing, I am extremely pretty. All the mothers of the kingdom want their daughters to look exactly like me. My blonde hair, my

blue eyes, my gentle disposition. I am the example of goodness for the entire world to follow. I rule my people with a gentle hand and the country lives in peace and joy, held together by sheer love of me!

(CHRIS appears.)

CHRIS. I am the best queen who ever lived. Kings included. Everyone's amazed when they see me review the troops. I am the country's finest soldier. I rule with a firmness and dispatch that makes me the equal of any man living. In fact, I challenge you to find a man as reasonable and clear-headed as I. There is none extant. Last week I was paid the highest compliment ever. Parliament is thinking of declaring me king!

(CHRISTINA stirs, tortured by these visions. She raises herself and murmurs:)

CHRISTINA. I am going to give up the crown ...

TINA. What did she say?

CHRIS *(in amazement)*. She wants to give up the crown!

TINA. How can you consider such a thing?

CHRIS. You must be mad!

CHRISTINA. I'm lonely ...

TINA. You're *supposed* to be lonely. It's the privilege of your station.