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Dramatic Publishing

Mark Twain's
THE UNDERGROUND VENUS

Adapted for the Stage
by
TIM KELLY



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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THE UNDERGROUND VENUS

A Play in One Act

For a flexible cast of 3 men, 3 women

Plus 3 roles that can be either male or female, optional extras

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

GIOVANNA a young housemaid, about 14 or 15
JOHN SMITH a law student, about 20
GEORGE ARNOLD an American sculptor, about 20
MARY in love with George
MRS. MORGAN Mary's mother, a dragon
BOOTMAKER'S ASSISTANT* a hard worker
TAILOR'S ASSISTANT* another
BANKER'S ASSISTANT* another
PROFESSOR PARNELLI a government official

PLACE: An artist's studio in 19th Century Rome.

TIME: Spring.

*Can be played as male or female.

Running time: Approximately 30 minutes.

With special thanks to
Theatre Laurel of Los Angeles

THE UNDERGROUND VENUS

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *A poorly-furnished artist's studio, suggested by a table UC. On the table is a collection of tiny glasses. A small sofa or two-chair arrangement L. A chair DR. Maybe a dressing screen. The workroom is offstage, R.*

LIGHTS UP: *We hear GEORGE singing in the work area. He doesn't sing well, but he does sing loud. His selection is something from the Italian opera repertoire. Every now and again the vocal display is punctuated with the sound of chisel and mallet meeting [supposedly] marble.*

GIOVANNA'S VOICE (*from hallway*). I'm sure he'll be happy to see you. He always is.

JOHN'S VOICE. Never can tell with artist types. One day they're up, the next day they're down.

GIOVANNA'S VOICE (*calling out as she enters*). Signor Arnold! You have a visitor.

(GIOVANNA enters. She is a simple girl, pretty. She is followed by JOHN SMITH, an American. Self-assured, clever. He has a folded newspaper under one arm. GEORGE delivers a high, piercing note.)

JOHN. Why must every painter and sculptor I know insist on singing? Most of them are no good at it, and George Ar-

nold is no exception. He should stick to the mallet and chisel.

GIOVANNA. I'll tell him you're here.

JOHN. Thank you, Giovanna.

GIOVANNA (*exiting R*). Signor Arnold!

(JOHN takes his newspaper and unfolds it. Looks for a place to sit. He sits L. Crosses one leg over the other. Turns a few pages searching for a specific article.)

JOHN (*mumbling to himself*). Petrified...petrified...giant. (*Finds what he's looking for.*) Ah. Here we are. "Giant Hoax Exposed." (*The singing stops. JOHN takes no notice, his interest on his reading.*)

GEORGE'S VOICE. Mister Smith, you say?

GIOVANNA'S VOICE. Yes, signor. He's in the sitting room.

JOHN (*eyes on the newspaper article*). Amazing. Absolutely amazing what people will believe.

GEORGE'S VOICE (*entering*). Good morning, John. What brings you here so early?

(GEORGE enters. He wears a smock over his clothing. In one hand he holds a mallet and in the other a chisel. He is inclined to be emotional, given to mood swings.)

JOHN. They canceled my class at the university. The professor had to go to Venice for some court case.

(GIOVANNA returns.)

GEORGE. So you thought you'd stop off for an hour or so and pester me.

JOHN. Do you mind?

GEORGE. Not really, but I don't want to neglect my work. I tell you, John, this statue of Columbia I'm finishing will be my masterpiece. They'll be calling me another Leonardo da Vinci. (*Notices GIOVANNA.*) Did you want something, Giovanna?

GIOVANNA. Well, Signor Arnold, uh, that is—(*She indicates JOHN.*)

GEORGE. You can say what you have to say in front of Mr. Smith. He is my dearest friend. We have no secrets from one another.

JOHN (*news to him*). We don't?

GIOVANNA. My mother says I'm to collect the rent.

GEORGE (*crushed*). Oh. That.

GIOVANNA. Two months' rent. You're behind again.

GEORGE. So I am, so I am. What's the matter with you, Giovanna? This is hardly the time to discuss something so personal. Don't you see I have a visitor?

GIOVANNA. But my mother says—

(*GEORGE ushers her to the hallway. JOHN scans the newspaper article.*)

GEORGE (*anxious to be rid of GIOVANNA*). Yes, yes. Your dear mother. Lovely woman. Give her my best. (*GIOVANNA is gone. GEORGE puts the mallet and chisel on the table.*)

JOHN (*indifferent*). Out of funds again?

GEORGE. I owe the landlady, the bootmaker, the tailor. An artist's fate is a life of desperation. Hand to mouth.

JOHN. You must learn to be patient. Your day will come.

GEORGE. Yes, yes. You're right, of course. When I sell my statue of Columbia my reputation will be made. In the meantime, could you let me have a few dollars?

JOHN. Americans must stick together, I suppose. (*Produces some money.*) You owe me a tidy sum already.

GEORGE. There's no need to remind me. You're in good company. I've borrowed from everyone I know. (*Takes money.*) You're a splendid fellow, John. I'll get this back to you as soon as I can.

JOHN. No hurry. (*Indicates money.*) There's enough for dinner for two. Why don't you take your sweetheart out this evening? It would do you both good.

(As GEORGE laments, he walks about the room in nervous agitation. From time to time, JOHN allows his eyes to return to the newspaper article.)

GEORGE. Mary. Mary. Dear Mary. Sometimes I think if it weren't for Mary I'd toss in the towel.

JOHN. You mean the mallet, don't you? You're a sculptor, not a boxer.

GEORGE. Her mother hates me.

JOHN. A mother usually hates the man her daughter falls in love with. Unless he has money, of course.

GEORGE. That's so cynical. But I suppose you're right. However, Mrs. Morgan not only hates me, she scares me.

JOHN. Mrs. Morgan scares most people. I don't envy you having that dragon for a mother-in-law.

GEORGE. She's not my mother-in-law yet. I'm not being much of a host. But I'm afraid I have nothing to offer. Not even coffee and crumbs. Enough of my problems. How are your law studies progressing?

JOHN. Couldn't be better. I will be one of the few American lawyers in Italy who knows Italian law. When I have my degree I will have more clients than I can deal with. Rome