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Dramatic Publishing

NOT FIT TO PRINT

A Full-Length Play

By

WILLIAM GLEASON



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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A Full-Length Play
for Thirteen Men, Ten Women

C H A R A C T E R S

NOAH NICOLSON reporter for the *Metro Inquirer*
IDA PERRY college student
MAYNARD TREMAYNE journalism professor
DOYLE WITHERSPOON student friend of Ida's
MITZI PURDUE B-movie star
CHESTERTON Mitzi's butler
NICKY ZUTTS small-time hood
KRAVITZ editor of the *Metro Inquirer*
TRENDY WENDY SINGAPORE . . . reporter for *Metro Inquirer*
TIFFANY PASTELLE fashion editor for *Metro Inquirer*
DEAN WHITLEY college dean
ROGER, EMILY, RUTH reporters for *Metro Inquirer*
DEXTER photographer for *Metro Inquirer*
MARY, JOANIE, BOB, SHIRLEY college students
MITCH the bartender
LEFTY the drunk
MUGGER
COMPOSER

TIME: The Present

PLACE: The Metro Inquirer and places nearby

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PROLOGUE: The house lights fade and we hear the following from the darkness.

IDA (calling from offstage). Dean Whitley? Dean Whitley?

(The downstage lights rise to reveal DEAN WHITLEY walking briskly from DL to DR.)

IDA (calling from offstage). Dean Whitley?

WHITLEY (looking over his shoulder and muttering). Not again.

(IDA enters L and rushes to catch up with WHITLEY.)

IDA. You certainly are a fast walker, Dean Whitley.

WHITLEY. I make it a habit of walking fast when it's cold outside and dark. I feel the least I can do for the muggers lurking in the shadows is to give them a moving target.

IDA. I'm Ida Perry from the *State College Banner*.

WHITLEY. I have become painfully aware of that over the past semester, Miss Perry. No introduction is necessary. (He nods.) Now if you will excuse me . . . (He starts to cross.)

IDA. I have a few questions for you, if you don't mind, sir.

WHITLEY (stopping and sighing). It's late, Miss Perry, and I

have a great deal of work to catch up on.

IDA. And I have a deadline, sir.

WHITLEY. That, Miss Perry, is your problem. I will be glad to answer your questions at some other time. Right now I am tired, hungry, mildly depressed and my feet hurt.

IDA. My feet hurt, too, Dean Whitley. They hurt because I've been running around all evening trying to catch up with you. And when you are home sitting over your meal, I'll be typing up my article for the *Banner*. And when you are tucking yourself into your cozy bed, I'll be working on the layout of tomorrow's edition. And when you wake up in the morning refreshed and rested, I'll be rushing to every newsstand on campus filling them up with papers. And when you get to your office, prop your feet up and start reading the *Banner*, you'll feel an intense sense of guilt because you wouldn't take the time to answer a few simple questions that would have made my article so much more informative for the information-starved students and faculty of Stage College. I find it very ironic that men have fought and died to preserve our First Amendment rights and some people seem to take them for granted. Well, I don't, Dean Whitley, and I don't think you should either. Good night, sir. (She starts to cross.)

WHITLEY. Just a moment, young lady. (IDA stops.) I did a little bit of fighting to preserve those rights myself . . . when you were still a gleam in your father's eye, I might add.

IDA. Then you, sir, more than most should appreciate my dilemma. An informed populace is the cornerstone of democracy. But how can I inform the populace if those that are privy to information do not do their part?

WHITLEY (with a tired sigh). You're beginning to sound like Professor Tremayne.

IDA. Nothing would please me more, Dean Whitley.

WHITLEY. You said a few questions? (IDA nods.) How many

is a few?

IDA (pulling out a notepad and opening it). Seventeen.

WHITLEY (rolling his eyes and sighing). Are you hungry, Miss Perry?

IDA. I have not eaten since breakfast.

WHITLEY. I'll answer your questions if you'll ask them over the dinner table. Is that all right with you?

IDA. I wouldn't want to put you out.

WHITLEY. I find that difficult to believe, Miss Perry. My home is this way. I believe my wife is cooking liver tonight.

IDA. I hate liver.

WHITLEY. Good. Very good. You shall have two servings. (He gestures off.) Shall we? (He and IDA start to cross.)

(A seedy-type MUGGER enters with one hand in his pocket.

WHITLEY senses trouble and stops. The MUGGER steps toward IDA.)

MUGGER. Hey, you. Gimme that purse.

IDA (grabbing WHITLEY by the arm and brushing the MUGGER aside). Not now, mister. I've got an article to write. (WHITLEY, wide-eyed, crosses with her.) Now, Dean Whitley, about those funding cutbacks . . . (She and WHITLEY exit.)

MUGGER (shrugging and sighing). What's the world coming to? (The lights fade out and the MUGGER exits in the darkness.)

SCENE ONE

We hear the pulsating beat of a dancersize record and the cheerful, rhythmic exhortations of an ebullient exercise instructor, who urges her conscientious fitness freaks on to greater heights.

INSTRUCTOR (offstage, over music). And one, two, three, four,

five, six, seven, eight. And bend, and stretch. And bend, and stretch. And hold, and hold. And pick it up. Hold it. Hold it. Again. (She repeats the routine.)

(Area lights come up to reveal what is left of MITZI PURDUE, ex-blonde bombshell and B-movie star, on the comeback trail. Dressed in a shocking pink workout outfit, with "Starlet" written across the back, MITZI has gained a little weight since we saw her in *Two Thousand Sailors for Cindy*, but still retains the peppy pugnacity and little-girl face that made her first movie, *Gator Girl and the Intellectual*, such a moderate success. She doesn't seem to be completely into her exercise mode and she moves as little as possible to the continuing music. She is trying to do her nails and reaches out occasionally for a box of chocolates that are on a small table DR, along with a telephone.)

INSTRUCTOR (offstage, over the music). Okay, you corpulent cuties, let's reach for those toes, and I mean reach. Okay. Down we go! And one and two and . . . (MITZI bends several inches.) Really stretch now. Stretch till it hurts. No pain, no gain. (MITZI makes a face, then stretches.) Does it hurt?

MITZI (over the music). You bet it does!

INSTRUCTOR (offstage, over the music). How much?

MITZI (over the music). Loads.

INSTRUCTOR (offstage, over the music). Bend and bend and bend and bend. Shake it till you break it. Wiggle till you jiggle. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. Now kick with those legs. Let's go. Just like the Rockettes! And five, six, seven, eight. (MITZI kicks about three inches off the ground and works her way to the chocolates. She nibbles to the beat as she continues to kick.)

(CHESTERTON, Mitzi's very proper English butler, enters DR.

Holding a copy of the latest *Metro Inquirer*, he stands and watches MITZI. After a moment, MITZI spots CHESTERTON and motions for him to cut the music. He reaches offstage and the music dies. MITZI tries to recover from her strenuous workout.)

MITZI. What is it, Chesterton?

CHESTERTON. Breakfast is served, madam. And I also purchased a copy of the *Metro Inquirer* as you directed. Would you like to eat now or do you prefer to complete your regimen first?

MITZI. I'm famished, Chesterton. What's for breakfast?

CHESTERTON. Bean curd and seaweed puree.

MITZI. That wouldn't keep a laboratory rat alive.

CHESTERTON. Perhaps not, but then, how many rats attempt a comeback in motion pictures?

MITZI. You'd be surprised, Chesterton. Whew! (She wipes her brow.) I've been pushing myself to the limits of my endurance. I'll bet I've lost a pound since yesterday. (She turns.) Whadaya think, Chesterton? Can you notice a difference?

CHESTERTON (scrutinizing MITZI). Oh, indeed. Indeed.

MITZI (smiling and handing CHESTERTON a piece of candy). Good boy.

CHESTERTON. You look positively nubile.

MITZI (handing CHESTERTON another candy). Take two.

CHESTERTON. Svelte.

MITZI. What are you lookin' for, a raise or what?

CHESTERTON. Idle flattery is not my forte, madam. Diet and exercise have worked wonders for you.

MITZI. And in only two days!

CHESTERTON. Amazing! I venture to say that two weeks from now when you go to Mr. Rosenblatt's office, he will sign you for the role of Velma instantly.

MITZI. I certainly hope so, Chesterton. I need this part. I need

this movie. Do you realize what a shot it would give my lack-luster career to be in an epic like *Return of the Bible*? It could turn my life around.

CHESTERTON. And it will.

MITZI. Producers can be fickle. He wants someone skinny.

CHESTERTON. And skinny you shall be.

MITZI. You're right. Take that candy away. I'll not have another.

CHESTERTON (taking the box of candy). Good show!

MITZI (reaching into the box of candy). Just one for the road.

I hate myself. Let me see the paper. (CHESTERTON hands her the newspaper and she flips through it.)

CHESTERTON. Will there be anything else, madam?

MITZI (laughing shrilly and pointing to something in the paper).

Oh, this is a classic. Look at Liz with that lobster all over her face! Oink, oink. I love it! (She cackles and flips through more pages as CHESTERTON looks on.)

CHESTERTON. How do they get away with it?

MITZI. Who cares? (She points to something else in the paper.)

Get this! This guy with the space helmet on claims that Miss Shields is from the planet Mars. He claims that he was her agent on Mars and is suing for breach of contract. I hope he wins. She makes me sick. So young. So skinny. (She sighs.) Life goes on. Tacky, tacky. (She reads.) "African Faith Healer Claims New Cure for Common Cold." (Aside to CHESTERTON.) Take two hyenas and call me in the morning. (She turns another page, gasps, staggers back, and stares in horror at a picture.)

CHESTERTON. Is something wrong, madam?

MITZI (in shock). They didn't! They couldn't!

CHESTERTON. Didn't what? Couldn't what?

MITZI (holding the newspaper for CHESTERTON to see). Does the cow in the two-piece bathing suit look familiar?

CHESTERTON (looking from the picture to MITZI and back again). They couldn't. They didn't.

MITZI. They could. They did. I'm dead.

CHESTERTON. This is simply . . . simply . . .

MITZI. You can say that again. Simply the end of my career. When Rosenblatt sees this . . .

CHESTERTON. Perhaps he won't see it.

MITZI. Come on, Chesterton. The word is out. Plenty of people know that I'm up for that part. And you can bet that every enemy I've got is snipping this picture out and mailing it to Rosenblatt. (She reads.) "Success didn't go to Mitzi Purdue's head, but it certainly went to her waistline. Celebrity Snoopshot by Noah Nicolson." Creep.

CHESTERTON. Nicolson! That's the unpleasant young man I had ejected from the grounds last week.

MITZI. Why didn't you have him shot? (The phone rings and she answers it.) Hello. (She rolls her eyes and speaks quietly aside to CHESTERTON.) Now it begins. (Into the phone.) Why, good morning, Shirley. Long time no see. How's the filming going? . . . Really? . . . Talk of an Oscar, you say? (Aside to CHESTERTON.) Fat chance. (Into the phone.) How marvelous! . . . (She suddenly freezes.) . . . Picture? What picture? . . . *Metro Inquirer*? . . . Why no, I stopped reading that trash after they reported that you had a thigh transplant. I'm still furious about that. How are your thighs, anyway? . . . Good . . . Uh, huh. Well, I'll certainly pick one up if I happen to think about it. Thanks ever so much for calling. (She slams the phone down.) Witch! (She crumples the newspaper and throws it to the floor.) Those creeps! Those cruds! Those cretins!

CHESTERTON. Please, madam.

MITZI. Leave me alone, Chesterton. Can't you see I'm hysterical? (She sobs, screams and turns suddenly, with a hard edge to

her voice.) I want some scrambled eggs, bacon and pancakes.
CHESTERTON. But what about your diet?

MITZI. To heck with my diet. I need real food. I'll need all the strength I can get. Mitzi Purdue is declaring war on the *Metro Inquirer*. Feed me, Chesterton.

CHESTERTON. At once, madam. (He turns and exits.)

MITZI (steaming, crossing to the phone and dialing fiercely). Shaft Mitzi Purdue, will they? (She waits.) I'll teach them a thing or two. (Into the phone.) Hello? Let me speak to Mr. Horner at once. This is an emergency . . . What do you mean he's in conference and can't be disturbed? I don't care if he's in traction. I don't care if he's in Bolivia. You tell Mr. Horner of Howser, Hopper, Horner and Hepplewhite that Mitzi Purdue is on the phone and will wait for exactly ten seconds before sending her retaining fees to a firm where she gets a little service. I'm counting, honey. One, two, three, four, five . . . (Sweetly.) Why hello, Ernie. Hope I didn't interrupt anything. How're the wife and kids? . . . That's nice. I want to sue the *Metro Inquirer* for twenty million dollars . . . Uh, huh. That's what I said . . . Lunch will be fine. 'Bye, bye. (She hangs up the phone and the lights go out on her. She exits in the darkness.)

SCENE TWO

The lights come up on the Blue Note Bar, a moldy little cavern favored by the downwardly mobile set on the waterfront. It is the same morning and MITCH, the bartender, is wiping the small bar with the business end of a dish towel. A burly DRUNK is slumped with his head resting on the bar. MITCH picks up his head to wipe under it, then lets it go with a thump. The DRUNK moans.

MITCH. Don't mention it. (He notices money clutched in the man's hand and removes it gingerly.) Keep the change? (Another moan.) Why, thank you. I'll do just that. (He pockets the money.)

(NOAH enters, dressed casually and carrying a paper. He looks around.)

NOAH (to MITCH). Are you Mitch?

MITCH. What's it to ya?

NOAH (crossing to the bar). Noah Nicolson. *Metro Inquirer*. I got your message.

MITCH. Oh, yeah. How ya doin'?' (He wipes his hand on his apron and shakes hands with NOAH.) I didn't think you'd really come down here.

NOAH. You've got me interested.

MITCH. How about a drink?

NOAH. You got any milk?

MITCH. Milk? Does this look like a dairy to you? (The DRUNK makes a mooing sound.) Shut up, Lefty. Can't you see we're talkin'?

NOAH. I'll pass on the drink. Why don't you just fill me in on the details. You're sure it's Professor Tremayne that's been coming in here every week?

MITCH. No doubt about it. It's him all right. I seen him on television last week. And his picture's always in the paper for somethin'. And Nicky – that's the hood he's payin' off – Nicky calls him the Professor. No doubt about it.

NOAH. Are you sure they'll be in this morning?

MITCH. Every Wednesday at ten, like clockwork. And every week there's a payoff. I seen it with my own eyes. I got twenty-twenty vision where money is concerned.

NOAH. I'll just sit at the other end of the bar.

MITCH. And speakin' of payoffs . . . (He rubs his hands together.) . . . didn't we mention somethin' about a fee for my services?

NOAH. Just as soon as I verify your story. Sorry, that's the rules. (He motions to a seat.) Is this all right?

MITCH. Yeah, but try not to look so wholesome. You stick out like a sore thumb. (He goes to the DRUNK, gets his hat and throws it to NOAH.) Put this on. (NOAH picks up the hat distastefully, shakes it and slowly eases it onto his head. MITCH smiles.) Perfect. Now you better get a drink. You don't want to look out of place.

NOAH. Soda pop.

MITCH (getting the drink). You reporters are real he-men. (He hands the drink to NOAH.)

NOAH. We try. (He raises the glass.) Mud in your eye.

DRUNK (raising his head). Now yer talkin'. (NOAH drinks and coughs on it. MITCH laughs and shakes his head.) How about a short one for the road, Mitch buddy?

MITCH. You got any money left?

DRUNK (feeling his shirt). I got plenty of money. (He can't find the money.) Hey, where's my money?

MITCH. Don't ask me.

DRUNK. I seem to be temporarily bereft of funds. How about one on the house. I'll pay you back Friday. I'm good for it.

MITCH. You ain't good for nothin'. Get out of here.

DRUNK. Just one.

MITCH. Get lost, ya bum.

DRUNK (getting to his feet). That ain't no way to talk to your brother, Mitch. I'm tellin' Morn.

MITCH. Go ahead and tell her. I don't care. Now get out before I throw you out!

DRUNK (moving towards the door). Okay, okay. I never did like this low-life bar anyway. See ya tomorrow, Mitch.