

# Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

---

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

---

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

# **JERRY FINNEGAN'S SISTER**

by  
**JACK NEARY**



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

**\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

**DRAMATIC PUBLISHING**  
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

***COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.*** This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

©MCMXCIII by  
JACK NEARY

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(JERRY FINNEGAN'S SISTER)

*Cover design by Susan Carle*

ISBN 0-87129-300-5

# JERRY FINNEGAN'S SISTER

A Play in Two Acts  
For One Man and One Woman

## CHARACTERS

**BRIAN** . . . . . now 23, seen also at various times through his  
childhood and teenage years

**BETH** . . . . . lives next door to Brian. A year younger, she too  
appears at various ages through the course of the play

The play happens right now, right here.

*As time goes by, producers and directors of this play may wish to make adjustments when a contemporary reference might not seem so contemporary anymore.*

## ***Previous Production Acknowledgements***

In its various stages of development, *JERRY FINNEGAN'S SISTER* was presented:

... by the Foothills Theatre, Worcester, Mass., September 1986

Brian: BRIAN SMITH  
Beth: BETH SCHAEFER

... by Playwrights Platform, Boston, Mass., June 1989

Brian: BRIAN SMITH  
Beth: KARLA HENDRICK

... by the St. Vincent Summer Theatre, Latrobe, Pa., June 1990  
(first professional production)

Brian: MARK WESLEY-WRIGHT  
Beth: ROBIN WALSH

... and by New Century Theatre, Northampton, Mass., July 1991

Brian: CHRISTOPHER CONNELL  
Beth: JENNA MOSCOWITZ

ALL PRODUCTIONS WERE DIRECTED BY THE AUTHOR

## ACT ONE

**SETTING:** *The set represents a number of places, all of them firmly etched in BRIAN DOWD's memory. For our purposes, it's essential that the setting be extremely flexible, perhaps even stark, with the focus always on the characters. There are places to sit, places to perch, but nothing very naturalistic. BRIAN's neighborhood should be one that's reflective of the neighborhood of anybody's youth. As such, the neighborhood is in the mind of the individual audience member, as drawn there by BRIAN.*

**AT RISE:** *BRIAN is there. Wherever "there" is. He appears to be in his early twenties. He addresses the audience.*

**BRIAN.** Look, you don't know me. That's a problem. I'm telling you this story, see, and it's about me, sort of, but it's mostly about her. And this story is happening right now. Right here. Even as I speak. So if I took the time to go into my life's history, we'd be here till God retires, you'd know all about me, nothing about her, and you'd tootle home in your Subarus in a state of theatrical bankruptcy. (*Eyes audience.*) Are you with me on this? (*Prompts response; smiles.*) Good! Anyway, I got up this morning and I said to myself, today is the day. Today I will make contact with Jerry Finnegan's sister come hell or high water. I mean, there she was, right next door...There she'd been, right next door, for most of my life, and here I

was, doing absolutely nothing about it. I had my reasons. The way she looks is one of them. Oh! Wait! Okay...you need that. You need to know the way she looks.

*(BETH appears; she is a year younger than BRIAN and a knockout.)*

BRIAN. This is the way she looks. As far as I'm concerned, this is the way she looked coming out of the womb. *(To BETH.)* Thanks.

BETH *(a glorious smile)*. Sure! *(She disappears.)*

BRIAN *(to audience; with resignation)*. And this is the way I look. *(Lets them look.)* In fact, I think I looked *better* coming out of the womb. Which is why I could never get anywhere with girls. Especially with girls who look like she looks.

*(BETH appears again.)*

BRIAN *(to BETH)*. Thanks.

BETH. Sure! *(She disappears.)*

BRIAN. Comparatively, okay, I'm not repulsive. Put me in a room with twenty other guys, there's bound to be one or two who make me look like Mel Gibson. But when it comes to thinking about serious necking with girls who look like this...

*(BETH appears again.)*

BRIAN. Thanks.

BETH. Sure! *(She disappears.)*

BRIAN. Let's face it—I get the Prince Charles Thanks But No Thanks Award. But—okay. Today. Today I said,

"Brian, no more. This is it. Breakthrough. Start spreadin' the news." I am gonna connect with Jerry Finnegan's sister if it costs me brain death by humiliation. What brought all this on was something Jerry said to me last night. He said... "Brian, guess what?" ...Which I hate. I hate it when Jerry Finnegan says "Guess what?" to me. So far, in our long friendship, Jerry Finnegan has said "Guess what?" to me four times. Once when my dog Snuffles got hit by the ice cream truck. Once when my brother Kevin accidentally set fire to my learner's permit. Once when my Aunt Gwen got arrested for shoplifting Milk Duds at Safeway, and then again last night. He called me at one minute to midnight and said, "Brian, guess what?" And I froze. "My sister is going to get married," he said. I was speechless... So Jerry hung up. And I went to bed. That kind of information just has to be absorbed flat on your back. So today, I woke up galvanized! (*He stands, galvanized.*) Which hurts. And I decided that if I was going to do it, I was going to do it with words. Words, it finally occurred to me, were what Beth Finnegan and I could never come to terms on. I'd throw a word in her direction and it'd be like a fried egg on Teflon. It'd sort of flop on her pan, sizzle there for a couple of minutes, and then slide right off. Nothing stuck. The words coming out of my mouth just would not penetrate. But I could see something in there that wanted to hear me. It was so frustrating. From our very first meeting. When the Finnegans moved next door. I was about seven.

(*BETH appears as a little girl.*)

BETH. Hi!

BRIAN (*as a little boy, to his unseen mother*). Ma! Ma!  
Who's that?...Who?...The new kid has a sister? (*Takes a*

*moment to observe BETH. Still to his mother.) That stinks!...Why?...Why can't I say that?...Daddy says when something stinks it stinks and we should say it stinks!*

BETH. Hi!

BRIAN (*after a stare at BETH; to Mom*). Huh?...What? No! No! I don't wanna say hi! No!

BETH. Hi!

BRIAN. No, Mama, please don't make me...Oh, no...You will?...You would really do that?...No *Three Stooges* for a week? (*Pauses; looks at BETH, who leans in, ready; he almost speaks, then, to Mom*). How about just the ones with Shemp?...No, huh? (*Turns back to BETH.*) Okay. (*Weakly.*) Hi.

BETH (*with major enthusiasm*). Hi!!

BRIAN (*looks to Mom as she apparently walks away*). No, Ma! Ma! Where're you going? Don't leave me here! No! Ma! (*She is gone; he turns; BETH beams.*)

BETH. What stinks?

BRIAN (*long pause; he stares her down*). I'm taking a bath later.

BETH. Me too.

BRIAN. By myself.

BETH. Me too.

BRIAN (*pause*). We have two bathrooms.

BETH. Me too.

BRIAN. I'm seven.

BETH. Me too but I'm six.

BRIAN. I'm not gonna play with you.

BETH. Okay.

BRIAN. You can't make me.

BETH. Okay.

BRIAN. I'm not going to.

BETH. Okay.

BRIAN (*pauses; searches*). My father sweats through two shirts when he jogs.

BETH. My father...

BRIAN. And he can put both of my sneakers into one of his.

BETH. My father...

BRIAN. And he lets me stand on the hamper and watch him bleed when he shaves.

BETH. My father...

BRIAN (*triumphantly*). And he says if it stinks it stinks and we should say it stinks!

BETH. MY FATHER EATS LIGHT BULBS AT PARTIES!

BRIAN (*looks to audience, then back to BETH*). Doesn't he get sick?

BETH. No! But when he does it, my mother makes him sleep in the cellar with the gerbils! (*She faces audience, smiles, and disappears.*)

BRIAN (*to audience, at twenty-three*). Words. Words always got in my way with Beth. And the more words I learned, the more trouble I got into.

BETH (*off, at nine, calling*). Bri-an!

BRIAN (*to audience*). By the time I was ten...

BETH. Bri-an!

BRIAN. ...I had learned enough words to embroil me in something of...a political exchange.

*(BETH appears, at nine, carrying a large paper bag with something round and imposing inside it.)*

BETH. Brian!

BRIAN (*at ten*). What?

BETH. C'n you c'mout?

BRIAN. For what?

BETH. To play.

BRIAN. With you?

BETH (*taken aback*). You...always play with me.

BRIAN. I just turned ten.

BETH (*cheerfully*). I came to your party. I gave you the album, remember? "The Brady Bunch Sings How Great Thou Art And Other Favorite Hymns!"

BRIAN (*with hideous meaning*). I'm ten now.

BETH. So?

BRIAN. So...that's it.

BETH. It is?

BRIAN. With girls. Playing with girls. I'm ten. I'm not gonna do it anymore.

BETH. You played yesterday.

BRIAN. I was nine yesterday.

BETH. C'mon...I got my father's bowling ball out of the closet. We can take it out back and drop it on anthills!

BRIAN. Can't you understand English? I'm not playing with you anymore. I'm ten. You're a girl. And I'm too old.

BETH (*cagily*). You can be bombardier...

BRIAN (*almost sucked in, fights it off*). Besides...you're a...a publican.

BETH. I am?

BRIAN. You're a publican, and my father says that's weird that your father's a publican and his name is Finnegan. He says if you're a publican your name better be Lodge or Cabot or something...WASPY like that. He says anybody with a name like Finnegan who isn't a dema...dema... dema-crum, is two Buds short of a six-pack!

BETH. I am not a publican.

BRIAN. Your father is, and that makes you one, too.

BETH. But why won't you play with me?

BRIAN (*exasperated*). I'm ten. You're a girl. And your father's a publican!

BETH (*equally exasperated*). I just wanna drop a bowling ball on anthills!

BRIAN. And you know who else was a publican?

BETH. Who?

BRIAN. President Richard A. Nixon from my history book!

BETH. He was not!

BRIAN. He was too!

BETH. He was not!

BRIAN. President Richard A. Nixon and your father and you are all publicans, and that's why the country is going to hell in a handbasket! (*This, like most of BRIAN's pronouncements in this scene, is clearly a quote from his father.*) .

BETH. Who's going to hell?

BRIAN. The publicans!

BETH. We are not!

BRIAN. My father says that the publicans are going to hell after they get out of jail for what they did to the water gate.

BETH. What'd they do?

BRIAN (*not at all sure*). You...know what they did.

BETH. I do not. What'd they do?

BRIAN (*stalling*). Who? The publicans?

BETH. Yeah. To the water...

BRIAN. Gate.

BETH. Yeah!

BRIAN. Didn't you have it in your own history book?

BETH. Not yet. We're only up to the Meema, the Pimpa and the Santa Marina. Columbus doesn't even land till Monday. C'mon...tell me what the publicans did to the water gate! (*BRIAN's following explanation is the result of endless dinner table sermons by his father, the Watergate buff. BRIAN recalls fleeting words from the sermons, and does*

*the best he can putting them into historical perspective for BETH.)*

BRIAN (*panics*). Uhhh...

BETH. Oh, you don't know.

BRIAN. I do too! My father tells me about it all the time.

BETH. So what did the publicans do to the water gate?

BRIAN (*cornered*). Well...they...they...they took all the water.

BETH. They did?

BRIAN. Yeah. From...the...poor people of Cuba.

BETH. Poor people...

BRIAN. Yes. The...poor people of Cuba had all this...water and...they had it in a big...big...laundry...with a gate on it and...when they weren't looking...the publicans made their...plumbers...drive up in tanker trucks and they took all the water to President Richard A. Nixon.

BETH. Then what'd they do?

BRIAN. They...put it in his pool.

BETH. And what'd he do?

BRIAN. Who?

BETH. President Richard A. Nixon.

BRIAN. He...he...covered it up.

BETH. The whole pool?

BRIAN. Yeah...but...some of it leaked!

BETH. On the lawn?

BRIAN. Yeah...and...and all the publicans got scared and...and ran away to the movies.

BETH. What'd they see?

BRIAN. Deep Throat. But they got caught and they all went to the slammer and wrote best sellers and found Jesus. Period. End of story.

BETH. So that's it?

BRIAN. That's what?

BETH. That's why you won't bomb anthills with me?

BRIAN (*frustrated*). Oh...just...ask Jerry.

BETH. He won't play with me, either.

BRIAN. Why not?

BETH. Because he's ten.

BRIAN. See?

BETH. Please?

BRIAN. No.

BETH. Pleeese?

BRIAN. Nooooo!

BETH. Well...I hate you!

BRIAN. I hate you, too.

BETH. And I hope...the publicans come and steal all your water and...give it to the poor people of Cuba!

BRIAN. They won't give it to the poor people of Cuba, they'll give it to President Richard A. Nixon!

BETH. President Richard A. Nixon doesn't want your crummy water!

BRIAN. PUBLICAN!

BETH. JERK FACE!

BRIAN. PUBLICAN!!

BETH. STUPID HEAD!!

BRIAN. PUBLICAN!!!

BETH (*bursts into tears, races away*). DADDY!!!

BRIAN (*to audience; current age*). They called me the Sam Donaldson of Otis Street. She made me crazy, but I had to make a point. Jerry told me she cried for two hours and then she asked him to have me killed. I said why didn't she ask you to kill me yourself. Jerry said Beth didn't want that because if Jerry killed me himself he'd never get into heaven. So she told him to hire a Protestant. (*Frustrated*.) I think, maybe, it must be the guy from California she's gonna marry. He has this awesome car and it's Italian and

it's so low to the ground he gets in it without even using the door. I think he thinks that's supposed to be impressive. *(Pause.)* It is. *(To audience.)* The night of the Water-gate Debate, I got a call. *(Ten again, picks up phone.)* Hello?

BETH. Hello, is this Todd?

BRIAN. Todd who?

BETH. Todd Kent.

BRIAN. Who's Todd Kent?

BETH. Who's this?

BRIAN *(to audience)*. She knew who it was. And I knew who Todd Kent was. He was a kid at school. The Sacred Heart. Todd Kent. His only serious distinction in life was that he had a name that made him sound like Superman's dorky brother.

BETH *(really put on)*. Oh! Did I accidentally call the wrong number? I was calling my *friend* Todd. My friend who *wants* to play with me. Who did I call by accident, please?

BRIAN. Todd won't play with you.

BETH. He will too!

BRIAN. Not for long. He'll be ten in two weeks.

BETH. Oh! Is this Brian Dowd?

BRIAN. You don't even know Todd Kent.

BETH. I do *so*, and *his* father has a bowling ball *too* and we're gonna bomb twice as many anthills as you and me *ever* did!

BRIAN. Didn't your publican father ever tell you it's a sin to tell a lie?

BETH. Oh! There's the doorbell! That must be Todd now!

BRIAN. You must think I'm a real deadhead.

BETH. Don't you be looking out the window to see if he's really here, either!

BRIAN. Are you kidding me? What do I care if he's really there? Especially when he's not really there!

BETH. Well just don't.

BRIAN *(to audience)*. As soon as she hangs up I order myself not to look. I know that if I look she'll be looking right back at me and pointing and laughing and Todd Kent wouldn't be anywhere in sight. I know absolutely that Todd Kent is not there on her doorstep. I mean I know he's off scouting phone booths with his brother or something. He is not going to be bombing anthills with Beth Finnegan. To look is to lose. To look is to fail. To look is to die. *(Pause.)* So I look. *(He does. She has been staring and waiting. She points and laughs and goes mercifully away.)* It was then that I was introduced to the cruel dart board of deception. I've been a bull's-eye ever since. After that I didn't have anything substantial to say to Beth for a long time. Not that I ever did. I guess, though, that my silence was trying to make a point. Although, mainly I think I was just trying not to get humiliated. *(He sit and flips through a book.)*

*(BETH appears somewhere below and yells up to him.)*

BETH. I know you're sitting up there in your room, Brian. I can tell because the sun's out and it's hitting your window and when you turn the page of your book it makes a shadow for a split second...*(BRIAN looks to audience, but doesn't respond to BETH.)* What're you reading? *(No response.)* Know what I'm reading? *(Nothing.)* In school? *(Nothing.)* It's a book called "Meet Your Body"! *(He reacts; she continues enthusiastically.)* "Meet Your Body" by Sister Mildred Annuciata, O.F.M. It's a Science Book! It tells you all about every single solitary inch of your body

and what you're supposed to do with each part! (*BRIAN reacts; still no response to BETH.*) And when! (*Another BRIAN reaction.*) It starts with the feet and works its way up. Todd says that's 'cause it's written by a nun and it figures she'd take the long way to the good parts. (*Still not a word from BRIAN.*) How come you talk to Jerry but you won't talk to me? (*Nothing.*) Is it because I'm a girl and you're a boy? (*Nothing.*) I've met my body. I know the difference! (*Nothing.*) Well...want me to tell you how my book turns out? (*Nothing.*) Brian? (*Nothing; she gives up.*) I'll call you when we get to the neck! (*She disappears. He's still frozen.*)

**BRIAN** (*to audience*). We had that book the year before. All I could think about when she yelled up at me that day was Chapter Nine. Then I thought about Beth. Then I thought about Beth *and* Chapter Nine...Then I threw up. Words continued to fail me. So what else was new? Finally, I decided to forego the words and substitute a little action. It occurred to me in the twilight months of my twelfth year that something new and delightful was making its chemical way through my body. And with this I knew that it was no longer practical to retain Beth Finnegan as the object of my pre-adolescent scorn. And there was one way, and only one way, I believed, to impress the eleven-year-old cutie next door who had magically sprouted some fascinating new bumps of her own in recent days. (*Takes out a cigarette.*) Yes. The Evil Weed. Or...one of the major evil weeds. I sincerely believed that dangling one of these babies precariously off the side of my lips would obscure the Alfred E. Neuman side of me in her eyes. And put me on the inside track to her heart. So...after school one day, I situated myself under the black bridge by the river where I knew A) she'd come by almost immediately on her way home and