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Dramatic Publishing

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A FULL-LENGTH PLAY

Tear Along the Dotted Line

by

JULES TASCA



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(TEAR ALONG THE DOTTED LINE)

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TEAR ALONG THE DOTTED LINE

A Funny-Sad Comedy

For Two Men and Five Women

CHARACTERS

STEPHANIE NEWCOMBE *a college student*

KURT HINES *her boy friend*

JUDY PARKS *her roommate*

KAREN MATHEWS *a neighbor*

MRS. OLDAC *the landlady*

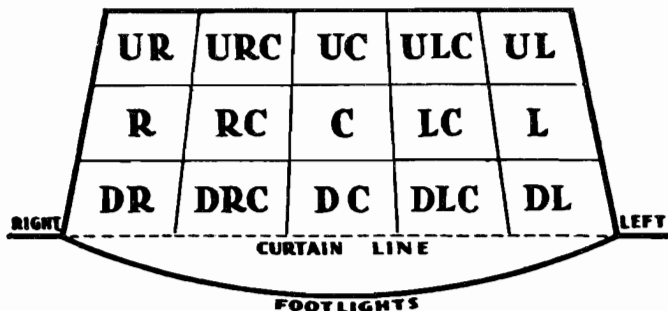
MRS. NEWCOMBE *Stephanie's mother*

RUDOLPH *Mrs. Oldac's son*

PLACE: *An efficiency apartment in a college town.*

TIME: *The present.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

ACT ONE

Scene One

SETTING: The curtain opens on an undersized, squalid efficiency apartment. The walls are covered with scrawlings such as "Wisdom through Suffering," and a few out-of-date calendars. There is a door ULC which is the entrance. Next to this and off to one side is a small kitchen table with a few unmatching chairs piled on it. At L is a kitchen sink piled with old gift boxes and newspapers; above the sink is a stained, smudged window which admits enough light to depict late afternoon. Next to the sink is a tiny, grease-smearred four-burner stove, and far DL stands an ancient, creamy yellow refrigerator. Stage DR has a bar for hanging clothes; next to that is a radiator. At R there is another door. UR harbors a small cubicle with a door which serves as a bathroom; and up against the back wall URC is a bookcase. At stage C is a medium-sized, convertible sofa bed which is now a sofa with an end table right of it. Far DC, lying on its side, rests a broken coffee-table with a telephone on it. All the items are surrounded by broken chairs, lamps, a hassock with stuffing belching out. Finally, everything is connected by miniature expansion bridges of cobwebs, the utter mess overseen by a very poor abstract painting which hangs askew on the center wall.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: As the curtain opens, we see STEPHANIE NEWCOMBE, a clean-looking co-ed and her boy friend, KURT HINES, a typical college boy, looking over the apartment.)

KURT. Steph, it's a bad idea. You got it soft at home. You don't want to rent this.

STEPHANIE. It's only ninety dollars.

KURT. If God had meant you to live here, he would've made you a spider, not a college kid.

STEPHANIE. Let me see what Judy says.

KURT. How'd you know you'd like living with what's-her-name?

STEPHANIE. Judy Parks. We're the same semester. She said she was looking for a place, too, so we agreed.

(A voice calling "Steph. Stephanie!" is heard off. The door ULC opens. JUDY PARKS enters. She is a bon vivant about STEPHANIE's age. In contrast to STEPHANIE, she is dressed in jeans, a blouse, sandals, and some beads.)

JUDY. I got your message, and . . . (Pauses. Scans the room.) Man, oh man, Steph. Man, oh man. I gotta call my archeology prof -- when man first stood upright, it must've been right here.

STEPHANIE. Judy, this is Kurt Hines.

KURT. Hi.

JUDY. Hello. Very handsome, Steph. But this place. . . .

STEPHANIE. It'll be okay. I mean, somebody'll make some nice curtains for the windows, and

. . . .

JUDY. And it'll be condemned with nice curtains. Who'll make curtains -- that refugee from the

geriatrics ward downstairs?

KURT. She's met the landlady, Mrs. Oldac. I think Steph's crazy, Judy, but she wants to fix it up.

JUDY. To move anything would be like disturbing a grave. There's a spider starting a web around my left leg. I guess that makes me the 4:00 to 12:00 shift catching flies.

STEPHANIE. Before you say no, let me show you around. (She moves C.) This is the sofa. You just pull something on the bottom and it converts right into a bed for two. (She pulls and pulls. No success.)

KURT. Doesn't wanna convert.

JUDY. Maybe you have to look like you're ready for bed. Put on your pajamas and stand in front of it and I'll yell "ready or not!" (STEPHANIE gives up on the sofa bed.) I hope the coffee table converts into a chapel so I can pray you're only kidding about living in this rubble.

KURT. Steph, Judy's got the right idea about this place. Let me drive you both home.

STEPHANIE. I don't want to go home. (Pause. Goes UR.) This is the bathroom. (She kicks open the bathroom door.)

JUDY (inspecting it). This. This is the bathroom? Who had this place last -- pygmies?

KURT (lighting a cigarette). You'd better tell her about the hot water pipes.

JUDY. Something's wrong with the hot water pipes? (STEPHANIE nods, and JUDY heads for the front door.)

STEPHANIE (pulling her back). Wait.

JUDY. There are hot water pipes, aren't there, Kurt?

KURT. Yes.

JUDY. Chalk up one for the twentieth century!

KURT. But! There's something wrong with them and you only get hot water in the bathroom in the spring and summer.

JUDY (pause). In the spring and summer? You're kidding.

STEPHANIE. It's true, Judy, but . . .

JUDY. That's great, Steph. Great! We. . . we can sit around all winter and talk about those neat hot baths we're gonna get come spring!

STEPHANIE. So okay. Calm down.

JUDY. Calm down? I won't have a hot bath until the forsythia comes out, and you want me to calm down?

STEPHANIE. Okay, let's just tell Mrs. Oldac no and get out. (She sits down on the sofa.)

KURT. Okay. Let's go. (Pause.) Well? See. She mouthed off to her mother about how she could shift for herself. Now she's got too much pride to go home.

JUDY. I know, Steph. But no hot water till spring! Man, will I have my eye on that damned ground hog this year. He won't even worry about seeing his shadow. He'll just take one whiff of us and shout, "It's spring, get in the tub!"

KURT. Oldac explained a way around the hot water problem.

JUDY. What? Five-month deodorant pads?

STEPHANIE. There's hot water in the kitchen sink.

JUDY. I see. While I'm doing the dishes, I hold my nose and dive right in.

STEPHANIE. You just fill up the tub with a bucket, that's all. What do you want for ninety dollars?

JUDY. Ninety dollars! (Pause. Crossing to door R.) What's that lead to -- a wailing wall for rent day?

KURT. An ordinary apartment.

STEPHANIE. Oldac said it was one hundred and twenty dollars a month. She says it's bigger and nicer.

JUDY. I bet it's nicer. The spiders probably whistle while they work.

STEPHANIE. No sense even looking at it. How much do you think we're gonna make waiting tables at Cradshaw's?

JUDY. Don't either one of you get me wrong. I like being on my own. But, hell, it'll take me awhile to get used to living lousier than *Oliver Twist*. (A noise like a shotgun blast emanates from the refrigerator. The three jump.) We just violated the test ban treaty!

KURT. Steph, can you imagine what your mother would say if she saw this place?

STEPHANIE. You should've seen her this morning. She pretended she didn't care. She can't even pretend she didn't care. While I packed, she was mending one of my blouses. I knew her mind wasn't on it -- she was sewing the sleeves together.

JUDY. Wow! Is that Freudian.

STEPHANIE. She can't get it into her head that I'm nineteen.

KURT. Eighteen and a half.

STEPHANIE. I can take care of myself. (To JUDY.) What'd your father say?

JUDY. Nothing. "Dad, Stephanie Newcombe and I are taking an apartment near the campus. We have jobs waiting tables to pay for it." All he said was: "Well, don't take my tennis racket." Ever since Mom died, that's all he thinks of. Maybe if I had an affair with Rod Laver. . . .

KURT. Well, what's it gonna be -- Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn? Huh?

STEPHANIE. I say bring up the bags, Kurt. Judy?

JUDY (after a pause). I guess if I put a cup of disinfectant in my cereal every morning the germs won't get me. Okay, damn it, my bags are in the foyer. (As KURT exits ULC.) Don't forget the tennis racket, handsome. (Back to STEPHANIE.) Look, suppose I go get some sandwiches?

STEPHANIE. Judy -- I mean, don't get lost. We've got to go straight to Cradshaw's.

JUDY. If I lose my way, I'll go up to the first spider I meet and ask him where they hold their national conventions. He'll lead me right here. (She exits ULC.)

(STEPHANIE shakes her head and grins. She crosses to the telephone and dials. Obviously, from her expression, there is no answer. She hangs up. There is a knock on the door. Then it opens and MRS. KAREN MATHEWS, a young woman only a few years older than STEPHANIE and JUDY, enters. She is obviously well into pregnancy.)

STEPHANIE. Hello. Come in.

KAREN. I'm Karen Mathews from 2B downstairs.

STEPHANIE. Stephanie Newcombe. Glad to meet you. You're pregnant. That's great. You married?

KAREN. Sure.

STEPHANIE. Excuse me. I mean, I heard so many lectures from my mother about kids getting into trouble that I guess I'm brainwashed.

KAREN (sitting). You gonna take the place?

STEPHANIE. Yeah. I got a roommate and a job. For my birthday, my boy friend's gonna buy me a broom.

KAREN. Hey, cheer up. It won't be so bad. The old woman, Oldac, is something of a miser, but you don't plan to spend the rest of your life here. As soon as Joe -- he's my husband -- finishes college, we're gonna get a house.

STEPHANIE. Is it quiet here for studying?

KAREN. It's quiet except for rent day. Oldac plays a lot of marching music.

STEPHANIE. Great. I flunked math last year and, I mean, I got to get my grades up in general. My mother . . .

KAREN. Gets upset?

STEPHANIE. Yeah. When I get low grades, she cries. Then she blames my low grades on Kurt, my boy friend. As if every time I see him my I.Q. drops five points.

KAREN. I know the type.

STEPHANIE. That's the reason I had to get out. The hysteria. She thinks my grades are bad because I see Kurt. They'd be lower without him -- he does all my term papers.

(KURT enters U L C with some suitcases.)

KURT. Hi. I'm Kurt Hines, the chauffeur and bell boy.

STEPHANIE. This is Karen. (KURT smiles and drops the bags. He exits again.) He doesn't like the idea of me moving in here.

KAREN. I can tell by the gentle way he treats your bags.

STEPHANIE. When's the baby due?

KAREN. December 10. The doctor says. I can never figure how they can give you an exact date. Like the doctor and the baby are pen pals.

STEPHANIE. I was two weeks late. My mother

never got over that. Every time the subject comes up, my mother looks at me and says, "This one was two weeks late," as if she wanted me to explain what I was doing for the two weeks.

KAREN. I guess she didn't want to see you leave home.

STEPHANIE. She expects me to be dead in twenty-four hours. See, I've never really been away from her. "Stephanie, you can't even find your clean pajamas at night. Live home. I'll give you a balanced diet. Suppose you get molested, Stephanie?" I've been gone one day and she probably thinks somewhere in New York her little iron-deficient girl is being molested without clean pajamas.

KAREN. She'll get over it.

(KURT enters with Judy's paraphernalia.)

KURT. Who'll get over it?

STEPHANIE. My mother.

KURT. Her? She hasn't gotten over the Lindbergh kidnaping. (He drops Judy's things.) And when she finds out about the seasonal hot water pipes

KAREN. Hot water problem? (STEPHANIE nods yes.) Our hang-up down there is electricity. If we use only two lights or appliances, the fuse blows out. If I wanna use my electric mixer, everybody in the building has to sit in the dark while I whip potatoes.

KURT. I don't believe it.

KAREN. That's nothing. Professor Smedley on my floor has no windows.

STEPHANIE. In his apartment -- no windows?

KAREN. No. Every other day he calls me on the telephone to find out if it's A. M. or P. M. (Foot-

steps sound offstage ULC.)

STEPHANIE. That's probably Judy. Don't mind anything she says. Half of it's an act.

KURT. An act? Do you know she pinched me on her way out?

STEPHANIE. Pinched you? (He nods yes.) Oh, come on.

KURT. Okay. Okay. I pinched myself. I'm a pinching pervert. That's why I always keep my hands in my back pocket.

STEPHANIE. He's just trying to get me to change my mind. (Noise of the steps getting closer.) Judy's just bitter because she thinks her father ignores her. She's really got a heart of pure...

(JUDY enters, ULC. She carries paper bags of sandwiches.)

JUDY. Asphalt! (She hands the bags to KURT, who puts them on the table.)

STEPHANIE. Judy Parks. Karen Mathews.

KAREN. Hello. (JUDY waves.)

STEPHANIE. She lives downstairs. She's pregnant, Judy.

JUDY. Either that or she's a basketball salesman.

STEPHANIE. See.

JUDY (taking a sandwich from one of the bags). Well, I see the apartment's still here. I was afraid the trash men were gonna come by and take it away.

KAREN. Don't worry. After you get it straightened out, you'll enjoy it here.

KURT. I'll bet the archangel used those very words when he booted Adam and Eve out of the Garden. Have a sandwich.

KAREN. I've got to go down and start Joe's supper soon. You kids go ahead. I'll have a cigarette.

(KURT, STEPHANIE, and JUDY proceed to eat.)

KURT. Steph, it's still not too late to change your mind.

STEPHANIE. No. We just have a few problems to work out, that's all.

JUDY. Speaking of problems. I hate to bring up one more, but does that old gentleman lying on his face on the second floor landing belong there?

KAREN. That's Professor Smedley, the old bachelor.

KURT. Mrs. Oldac told us he was retired.

JUDY. On the second floor landing.

KAREN. Probably drunk again.

JUDY. I thought he was a doormat till he smiled at me.

KAREN. Oldac charges him one hundred dollars a month.

STEPHANIE. And he's got no windows, Judy. No windows.

JUDY. He's lucky. If she had them put in, he probably wouldn't be able to afford the place.

KAREN. She promises everybody to send Rudolph around to fix everything.

JUDY. Who's Rudolph -- the guy who drives the getaway car on rent day?

KURT. Her son. Rudolph's her son.

JUDY. I'll bet he keeps that secret from his friends.

KAREN (to JUDY). I guess you got a hard time about moving, too.

STEPHANIE. He let her do whatever she liked since her fourteenth birthday, but she says he doesn't care. (The refrigerator again sends out a loud blast.)

KURT. I'm hit! Medic! medic!

STEPHANIE. Kurt, cut it out.

KAREN. What's that?

JUDY. Our fridge. We don't defrost it. We defuse it. (Rises with one of the paper bags.) Reminds me I'd better put the beer in.

STEPHANIE. Beer?

JUDY. A six-pack.

STEPHANIE. Should we start partying already?

JUDY. Partying? Who's partying? I just need some incentive to come back to this junkpile tonight. Partying? Whew! (JUDY opens the refrigerator door and an abnormally bright light blinks on and off.) Surprise, it's taking my picture!

KURT. Close that door before ships at sea head for this apartment. (She puts in the beer and closes the door.)

JUDY. What else? What the hell else could the fates devise for us?

(MRS. OLDAC enters ULC. She is an elderly woman whose appearance in no small measure resembles the apartment itself.)

JUDY (continuing). The fates never run out of ideas.

MRS. OLDAC. I got the lease if you're still interested.

JUDY. Interested isn't the word -- it's demented. We're still demented.

KAREN. I'd better go. Gotta get that electric range going before dark. Good luck.

STEPHANIE. Thanks.

MRS. OLDAC (yelling after KAREN as she exits). Would you push Professor Smedley back into his room for me? He's drunk again.

KAREN (off ULC). Okay.

JUDY. Push him back into his room. Why does she think he drinks?

MRS. OLDAC (with the lease). You gotta be twenty-one to sign this lease. Are you?

JUDY. No. But I'll even lie if it'll mean that I get to live in happy harbor here.

KURT. I won't sign it. I need all my strength for driving and carrying suitcases.

JUDY. I'll mail it to my father. If it means me out of the house, he'll sign it and have the pen he used bronzed as a souvenir.

MRS. OLDAC (putting on glasses). Okay. Now I'll go over the lease with you.

JUDY. This should be as exciting as Good Friday. (KURT lights a cigarette and picks up an ash-tray.)

MRS. OLDAC. First thing. No parties.

JUDY. That's an easy clause to figure -- these walls wouldn't even hold crepe paper.

MRS. OLDAC. Ninety dollars rent due promptly on the fifteenth of each month. If you break anything in here, I charge you.

JUDY. Mrs. Oldac, the way I feel today, if I found something unbroken in here, I'd break it and pay for it. (KURT drops the ash tray and breaks it.)

STEPHANIE. Be careful.

KURT. It was an accident. I get nervous when I hear big money transactions goin' on.

MRS. OLDAC. That was a forty-nine cent ash tray.

KURT. Here's fifty cents. (Hands MRS. OLDAC some change.)

JUDY. Keep the change. Buy yourself a couple more.

STEPHANIE. Leave her alone, Judy. Mrs. Oldac, is there anything else?

MRS. OLDAC. The rest of the lease is the standard do's and don'ts.