

Excerpt terms and conditions



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

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

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 reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

OPENED MAIL

A Comedy
by
JULES TASCA



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 any time 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”

©MCMXCVI by
JULES TASCA

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(OPENED MAIL)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-644-6

OPENED MAIL

For as few as 4 or as many as 26 actors

Contents

ACT ONE

1. War is Annoying!	5
2. Bank Withdrawal	11
3. Switching Rooms	15
4. The Amazing Powers of Eli Frankle	20
5. Pen Pals	25
6. Postcards From Sicily	31
7. The Seven Ages of Man (In Pharmacy Shopping Lists) ..	37

ACT TWO

1. The Washington Letters	39
2. Papyrus Found on Mount Ararat	48
3. Future Mail	55
4. Hamlet (The Telegram Version)	61
5. Fairy Tale Mail	65
 <i>Production Notes</i>	 74

for
HOWARD STEIN
who discovered me

ACT ONE

War Is Annoying!

(The lights come up on DWIGHT C. HALLSEY and his MOTHER seated on stools.)

DWIGHT. Dear Mom, I'm as sick as can be with my stomach. I'm not used to being at sea this long. It's very cramped on a transport ship. They think because they show us movies and have ping-pong and billiards and touch football games on deck that we're supposed to get all charged up and be happy. I miss the dog real bad and you and Dad too. Give Ginger an extra dog yummie for me. From somewhere in the Persian Gulf—I can't say where 'cause I don't really know where. I sign off now. Your loving son, Dwight.

MRS. HALLSEY. Dear Dwight, when I read your letter that you were seasick, I got sick myself. I couldn't keep a darn thing down. Then I made your father sick just listening to me in the bathroom. He went and got sick in the upstairs bathroom. I could hear him. It made me sick all over again. I can't sleep over this Persian Gulf thing, either. Since you shipped out, I sit up like a hoot owl praying to God Almighty that some kind person over there puts a knife in Saddam Hussein before anyone gets hurt. Trust in our Lord, son. Dad and I love you dearly, Mother.

DWIGHT. We made camp somewhere in the desert. Can't say where 'cause I don't really know. All we do is clean

our rifles and go through maneuvers. At night we sit and argue football and listen to Slim play his harmonica. It's really boring. There're no movies here. No P.X. You can't get a beer. It's torture.

MRS. HALLSEY. The news is getting worse. I had your father tie a fresh yellow ribbon on the porch. On the 6:30 news, smiling diplomats in blue suits are saying they will blast each other to kingdom come. Son, don't volunteer for anything, your father told me to write. I'm sending you a sweater and your favorite chocolate fudge. You should've gone to Canada like they did during Viet Nam.

DWIGHT. The fudge was scrumptious. I hid it in my tent so the guys wouldn't wolf it down. All we do is sit and eat. I gained five pounds. Mom, I can't wear a red sweater here. All my clothes are desert camouflage. My sergeant made me bury the sweater. I pulled a muscle in my back digging.

MRS. HALLSEY. I'm still not sleeping. I'm so worried about your back now. See the captain, Dwight. Since you're a casualty, tell them you want to come home. You buried your sweater and got hurt. You did your part. Let soldiers who are not wounded as you are carry on. Your father has put a yellow ribbon on the back porch and on his car now. P.S. I am knitting you a camouflage sweater.

DWIGHT. It's hell over here, Mom. A fight broke out over a volleyball game and a fellow named Reggie got a front tooth knocked out. What can you expect? Some of these guys have been stuck here without their families for weeks and they're cracking. I hate it here, Mom. I miss Ginger, and Slim and his harmonica is driving everybody nuts.

MRS. HALLSEY. God protect you! The bombing started! We saw it on the 6:30 news. Dwight C. Hallsey, whatever you do, don't go anywhere near Bagdad on a weekend pass or anything. And please God, don't go out without your gas

mask. That son of a bitch Saddam Hussein has gas. You can see it in his eyes.

DWIGHT. Mom, it's just something I wouldn't go through again. Newsmen trying to dig stories out of us. Planes going overhead waking us up at all hours of the night. And you can't keep the sand out of your boots. We now have to sleep with our gas masks on. The whole outfit looks like it's from the black lagoon. I hate harmonica music.

MRS. HALLSEY. I'm on Valium, son. I saw Scud missiles coming into Saudi Arabia on CNN. My nerves! Good thing you boys shot them down. Oh, I just hope I make it through this war, Dwight. We watch the briefings on TV everyday at 3 o'clock. The generals seem so sure of themselves. Why don't they just get some commando to stick a knife in Saddam Hussein? Your father bought us two gas masks at the Army-Navy store. He says, you never know. Keep safe, son. You're not like other boys. You've always been special. A cheerleader in high school and all that. You shouldn't be in a place where there's so much danger. I have to go now. Your father can't get his gas mask off, and he's scared the Avon lady half to death.

DWIGHT. I'm sorry to have to write this, Mom, but I don't want you to be real shocked when you see me. Yes, I was hit yesterday. They were throwing "ready meals" from the truck and one hit me smack in the face. It took four stitches in my cheek to close it. But I was sent right back on duty. With the war going full tilt now, they are merciless here. There was a night operation last night. In the dark, we beat up Slim and crushed his harmonica. Everyone likes him a lot more now.

MRS. HALLSEY. Son, I have called Congressman Callowhill on the phone and I'm trying to get you out. I told him you were injured twice, your back and your face. How much

hurt must he give, I told him, before he's relieved. Dwight, I'm a nervous wreck. Your father had the priest come and talk to me. All he could tell me was to trust in God and pray and he gave me a crucifix glued to a yellow ribbon. I'm changing parishes next week. God, how can the Iraqi people take all the bombing? Why don't they just put a knife in Saddam Hussein's ribs? Because I can't take much more. Your father is no help at all, either. I caught him on the floor of the attic trying to squeeze into his old Coast Guard uniform.

DWIGHT. Getting worse! The land war started! We're moving out over the sand. I don't know when I'll be able to get mail out again. Mom, I have a queasy stomach and I'm miserable. I don't know why I ever joined the Army. It's a rotten life. But stop your worrying, Mom. Okay? You know whatever happens I love Ginger and, of course, you and Dad. P.S. I want you to know I'm wearing the camouflage sweater you knitted, so wherever I go into combat, you'll be on my back.

MRS. HALLSEY. I am writing this, Dwight, from Justinian Mercy Hospital. Nervous exhaustion. Your father tied a yellow ribbon to my bed. The nurses gave me big horse tablets to make me sleep. In the drugged sleep, I worry about you. Last night, I dreamed that I was awake in a gas mask, worrying. There was this cloud of green gas coming toward me. Night before last, I dreamed that your father and me went to Bagdad and put a kitchen knife into the heart of Saddam Hussein. The blood woke me up. Love, Mother.

DWIGHT. Well, the war seems to be ending. I've never seen so many buses and trucks and jeeps in all my days. The Arabian desert looks like the Pennsylvania Turnpike at rush hour. No one in my platoon, company or, for that

matter, battalion ever saw an Iraqi soldier. But if we ever did, they'd regret they ever came to Iraq, I can tell you. We're told the Air Force bombed to death over 150,000 Iraqis in the war. It was worth it, too, because they had it coming. The captain told us we'll be able to wear a special ribbon showing that we fought here. It feels real good to win, Mom. It wasn't easy, but then, as Dad always says, nothing worth doing is. We did it all for you people back home whose way of life was in danger. We did it for all the neighbors and the neighborhoods back there. And for God too, Mom. That's what America's all about, I guess.

MRS. HALLSEY (*rising*). ...and I made a gigantic yellow ribbon for the front door and bought a dozen flags for all the windows in the house. Your father tied a yellow ribbon to the dog house. I have a flag pin on my coat and your father wears his old Coast Guard jacket everywhere—he tore the pants trying to get them on. Oh, I'm so happy the war's over! I tell everyone how bravely you fought. Concord, Lexington, Gettysburg, Iwo Jima—and now Dwight C. Hallsey in Arabia! My son, the hero! Living history, Dwight, that's what you are. I guess this war has made us all a little stronger. We've all had the steely taste of combat in our mouths and now we're a hardened people. You fought so well, they're planning a big parade when you boys get back here. Listen to this. Since you're the only soldier in your reserve outfit to be wounded—Congressman Callowhill set it up when I told him about your cheek—you're to ride in an open convertible with Mayor Denton. We're so proud, Dwight! I get chills when I see flags wave and hear the national anthem, I'm so proud, I can't sleep. I just sit up all night being proud. Well done, soldier! Well done, son! (*Lights begin to fade.*) Now we must pray for all those Iraqi people killed in the bombing

and give thanks that all the killing is at an end. I plan to do that next Sunday. For the life of me, I still can't figure out why some nice Iraqi doesn't take a knife to Saddam Hussein's throat. Can you? See you soon. Love, Mother.

BLACKOUT

Bank Withdrawal

(Lights come up on DOCTOR MALSPERN and MRS. MARY MUVO. He stands, she sits.)

MRS. MUVO. Dear Doctor Malspern, I am writing to the Center for Creative Genetics because my husband, Bosley, although a good wage earner, is sterile. Please send me your free information kit on artificial insemination as soon as possible. I want to surprise Bosley with this answer to our problems. Yours sincerely, Mrs. Mary Muvo.

DOCTOR. ...and let me add, Mrs. Muvo, that our center is in the vanguard of all new scientific family fertilization techniques. Our bank includes frozen sperm from Nobel Laureates in Medicine, eminent mathematicians from Cambridge, world-renowned physicists, Pulitzer prize-winning authors, the premiere legal mind in the United States; we even have in the back of the fridge, so to speak, a specimen from a left-handed baseball pitcher with the best sinker ball in the National League. Please call the Center for Creative Genetics if you wish to make an appointment. Ask for Babs.

MRS. MUVO. ...so Bosley did not react well to the whole thing, Doctor. I think it's because I chose to be inseminated with the sperm from the finest legal mind in the country. You see, Bosley is jealous because he only has a high school equivalency certificate and I'm now carrying a barrister in my belly. Bosley wanted me to take the left-handed sinker-ball pitcher, but I thought a lawyer's son sort of upgrades the family. For several days, Bosley could

not even get an erection, but he's coming around slowly. By the way, could I get the name of the lawyer whose baby I bear?? *I'm so curious.* I want to name the child Clarence Darrow Muvo. Bosley likes the name Joey. We'll see. Lastly, I want you to know how happy I am that since I couldn't get pregnant by direct deposit, I could avail my person of your sperm bank. Thank you for being so gentle with the syringe, Doctor Malspern, but I wish you hadn't smoked afterwards.

DOCTOR. My letter of the 13th stated explicitly that after these prominent world figures ejaculate and money changes hands, we guarantee that their names will never be revealed. Furthermore, trying to bribe Babs into divulging the name of your child's father is extremely disgusting. We try to keep all of this low key, Mrs. Muvo. No names. No gaudy publicity. Too many fringe groups frown on today's science. Fundamentalists and anti-onanist sects are constantly assailing us for bartering their Biblical seed. So please refrain from further investigation and just enjoy the fruits of Modern Medicine.

MRS. MUVO. ...I'm sorry I don't have a lot of good news to report. Enclosed please find the five year follow-up report on my son Clarence Darrow Muvo.

DOCTOR. I'm sorry to hear that young C.D. is a troublesome child. Children at this age are known to bite other children. I'm sure it'll all pass. And, well, killing the cat might just indicate an aggressive streak that could be channeled into creative avenues as Clarence grows. I do think, now that the authorities have intervened and your husband has stopped beating the child, that the youngster's behavior should improve.

MRS. MUVO (*rising*). I know I've ignored the latest follow-up, Doctor, but I've been beside myself. Bosley and I have

split up. That's why his section of the data sheet is blank. He blamed me that our family was dysfunctional. He said if I had taken the sperm of the baseball player the way he asked me to, he would've felt a part of the family planning. He just never forgave me for anything, Doctor. As for Clarence, he is doing such poor work in high school. All he wants to do is watch sports and chase girls. He resists all my attempts to get him to study. He won't read. He fights. He drinks beer. The sucker totaled my Buick.

DOCTOR (*sitting*). We at Creative Genetics are deeply sorry for all that's befallen you, Mrs. Muvo. Truly, we are. I suppose it's easy in hindsight to say that Bosley never should have moved back into the house. What a tragedy. Tears are running down Babs' face all over her dictation pad. Remember how we three had champagne at the conception? There must have been barbed wire anger in Clarence to make him beat your husband to death.

MRS. MUVO. ...also I must say I find it insensitive, Doctor, that you keep sending me these goddamned progress surveys! My son, Clarence Darrow Muvo, sits in an 8 by 10 prison cell, where he is known as Lefty. I know the tone of this letter is harsh, but eighteen years ago, I paid Creative Genetics a large sum of money from Bosley's inheritance to be inseminated by the best legal mind in the country, and I wind up with a boy who is at this writing in solitary confinement for trying to strangle the prison cook!

DOCTOR. Mrs. Muvo, of course, you have cause to be upset. The survey was sent by mistake. We certainly don't need a case history update to know what's become of poor Clarence. It's in all the tabloids. As we've written many times, we commiserate with your plight. But when we inseminate a woman with the best seminal fluid we can get our hands on, it's never a guarantee that offspring will turn out ex-

actly like a parent. We only hope to give the child some chic DNA and a good genetic start. So taking matters to litigation, Mrs. Muvo, is not in anyone's best interest. I have permission from him so I might as well reveal this to you: our legal counsel here at Creative Genetics just so happens to be one of the finest legal minds in the country. Yes, our lawyer here, who also happens to be my partner, was the donor in your insemination. Think this over carefully. He would represent us in any law suit. Would you, Mrs. Muvo, be so callous as to pit father against son, Clarence?

MRS. MUVO. I was ready to drop the lawsuit. I really was, Doctor Malspern. But the way I feel now I would pit Jesus against Mary! Yes! You bet your incompetent asses I am going to sue! God help me, but I am! This spring was a real eye-opener. Something's wrong! In court we'll find out who tags and files your sperm down there! After grade school, I never expected Clarence would become a world famous lawyer, but I did not expect a shifty-eyed son who never read a book or had an original idea in his life. He can't even make change for a dollar without moving his lips. Whose sperm did you sell me? Because now the New York Mets are trying to get him out of prison, Doctor. Why? Guess what? Clarence Darrow Muvo is the best left-handed sinker-ball pitcher in the history of the prison league.

BLACKOUT