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Dramatic Publishing

SHEL'S SISTER

by

TERRENCE ORTWEIN



Dramatic Publishing

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(SHEL'S SISTER)

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SHEL'S SISTER

A One Act Play
For Four Women and One Man

CHARACTERS

ELISABETH LOVELL* 16 years old
MAXINE LOVELL her mother, around 40
TONY LOVELL her father, also around 40
SHELLY LOVELL her older sister, 17-18
MARCIA STONE Shelly's sidekick, 17-18

*A non-speaking role.

TIME: Early June.

SETTING: The Lovell kitchen.

SHEL'S SISTER was developed by the Discovery Project at The Choate Rosemary Hall Summer Theatre Program, Wallingford, Connecticut, July, 1985. The author is indebted to director, Ron Emmons, and to the following cast:

ELIZABETH *Rebecca Brown*
MAXINE *Anne Kauffman*
TONY *Paul Tines*
MARCIA *Tracy Christian*
SHELLY *Davis Wilkins*

SHEL'S SISTER

SCENE: *Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.: the empty Lovell kitchen.*

AT RISE: *Girlish giggles are heard from upstairs. ELISABETH LOVELL enters. She is carrying two bags of groceries and a bag of charcoal. She hears the giggles and looks upstairs longingly. She sets one of the bags of groceries on the table. It falls over, spilling its contents, but she pays no attention to it. She sets the other bag of groceries on the counter and the bag of charcoal on the floor. She listens to the giggles again, goes to the kitchen radio and turns it on, drowning out the giggles. She changes the "dentist office" music to something of her own taste. She begins to put various items away, with no apparent interest or plan. Others she leaves out. She begins to prepare dinner, and she works at this throughout most of the play. This is done without system. Items once used tend to be left wherever she puts them down. The longer she works, the messier the kitchen becomes. A car stops and voices are heard off L. The woman's: "Can you get that bag?" The man's: "She left the car door open again. I almost hit it." ELISABETH hears this and rushes to the door, L. Then she stops herself, grimaces, and returns to the kitchen. She immediately busies herself in her duties.*

MAXINE LOVELL enters, carrying a bag of groceries. She sets the bag down and talks to ELISABETH without really looking at her.

MAXINE. Hi, honey. (*Indicating the groceries.*) You left these in the car. (*She sets the bag down.*) Shel home? (*ELISABETH begins to answer, but MAXINE doesn't pay any attention to her. She goes to the radio and turns it down while ELISABETH vaguely gestures upstairs.*)

(*TONY enters carrying a bag of groceries. He is in coat and tie.*)

TONY (*without really looking at ELISABETH*). Elisabeth, you left these in the car.

MAXINE. Put them over there. (*He sets the bag down. MAXINE begins to empty the bags.*)

TONY (*not too heavily*). You left the car door open again. You can't do that. I've told you a thousand times. Takes two seconds to close a car door.

MAXINE. So hot today, sticky.

TONY. Walden didn't come again today, so still no air conditioning.

MAXINE. Oh, Tony, I'm sorry. That must be awful for you.

TONY. Doesn't help bring in the customers, let me tell you. They're all home, floating in pools of ice cubes.

MAXINE. It's the humidity here. We'll just have to get used to it.

TONY. What I can't get used to is workmen who promise you and then don't show up. If I ran my business that way, I'd—

MAXINE (*to ELISABETH, but not really looking at her. Still rummaging in the bags*). Did you get the Drano? (*ELISABETH begins to respond, but before she can make a sound, TONY interrupts.*)

TONY. Oh, no. Again?

MAXINE (*playfully*). Don't worry. You won't have to play plumber again, Tony. It's not plugged, it's just running out slowly. I'm sure all it needs is a little Drano.

TONY (*to ELISABETH*). Can't you shampoo in the sink or somewhere?

MAXINE. All us girls do our hair in the shower. (*Including ELISABETH, with a smile.*) Tell him, Elisabeth, that's the price he pays for being surrounded by beauty.

TONY. At \$35 an hour, how can I forget? God, I wish I could afford to be a plumber.

MAXINE. Would you rather we were all bald?

TONY (*leaning into her from behind and grinning lecherously*). Hmmmm.

MAXINE. I take it all back. (*Pointedly handing him a box of cereal or whatever to put away.*) Here, make yourself useful.

TONY (*sexily*). Anything else I can help you with?

MAXINE (*enjoying, but with reference to ELISABETH*). Not at the moment, thank you very much. (*To ELISABETH.*) Drano?

TONY. This is the wrong charcoal, Elisabeth. Don't get this cheap stuff. Takes a whole can of fluid to get it going, and it ends up costing twice as much. (*ELISABETH looks at him for a moment, then busies herself. TONY looks at her, shrugs "What can I say?" gesture to MAXINE.*) You want a little something before dinner? Scotch? A martini?

MAXINE. I'm not up for a martini. A little Scotch. (*TONY goes R.*) Elisabeth, I can't find the Drano.

TONY. Shel home?

MAXINE. She's upstairs.

TONY (*calling upstairs*). Shel? Princess?

SHELLY (*from upstairs*). Daddy! (*MARCIA mocks simultaneously, "Princess!"*) Marcia's here! Don't call me that! (*Giggles from MARCIA.*)

TONY (*delighted, still yelling*). When the King comes home—

SHELLY. Daddy!

MAXINE. Tony, you'll embarrass the girl.

TONY. That makes you the queen, you know. (*He grabs her.*) Want to see the royal chambers?

MAXINE (*giggling and half-attempting to get his hands off her, referring to ELISABETH, who is watching them*). Tony!

TONY. I know. You girls are so-o-o sensitive. (*He releases MAXINE and stands in front of the bulletin board, which has on it SHELLY's college acceptances and a picture of her as prom queen—a color photo or a newspaper photo.*) Now that is a real princess. We did good work.

MAXINE. Did?

TONY (*enjoying the present tense compliment*). Do. (*He sidles up to her, holds her, and says breathily into her ear.*) Do, do-do, do, do. (*ELISABETH is watching.*)

MAXINE. Tony, you're being just awful today.

TONY (*in mock serious tone*). I'm sorry about that, Max, but I guess I've got to tell you. (*A tragedy!*) I noticed it this morning, first thing when I woke up. I don't know how to say this, but I think I've got...(*He pauses for dramatic effect, and then grabs her around the waist.*) puberty! (*They laugh. ELISABETH smiles at their foolishness.*)

MAXINE (*still laughing, but trying to calm him down*). Honestly, Tony, sometimes I think you—

TONY. I know. Thrilling, isn't it? But for now you'll just have to be satisfied with a Scotch. (*He begins to move R. ELISABETH goes to the radio and turns it up. He hears this, stops and turns to her.*) You leave that car door open again and it gets scratched, you'll pay for it. (*ELISABETH looks at him. He turns to go, and ELISABETH turns up the*

radio just a bit more. He goes to the radio and turns it off.)
Family time. We can do without all that noise right now, don't you think? (*ELISABETH drops her eyes.*) You know, I didn't pay for driver's ed lesson so you could—

MAXINE (*a plea*). Tony—

TONY. She's the only one who leaves the door open like that. I don't. You don't. Shel doesn't.

MAXINE. Tony, I said I'd talk to her. (*ELISABETH looks at them. TONY shrugs his shoulders at MAXINE and exits R. MAXINE purposefully begins to put things away and neatens up the kitchen as she talks to ELISABETH. Her tone is consciously cheerful and gentle.*) Let's put this away, shall we? (*After a bit.*) Your father is right, Elisabeth. You have to be more careful. We all do. Your sister will be in college in just three months, and her scholarship doesn't begin to cover all her expenses. In two more years, you'll both be in school, and I honestly don't know how we're going to afford it. Your father is working very hard and his accounts are growing, but he is on his own now, and it takes time. We all have to help as much as we can. The new drapes and carpeting cost much more than we'd planned on. And taxes are horrible here. Almost three times what they were at home, did you know that? So we're going to have to make do with what we have. The cars have to last us for years, Elisabeth. That's what worries your father. (*She pauses, takes a deep breath, and looks directly at ELISABETH.*) What I really have to talk to you about is your room. (*ELISABETH looks at her and then away. In a more definite tone.*) Elisabeth. (*ELISABETH catches the new tone of voice, and she looks at her mother.*)