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*Dramatic Publishing*

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# STICKS 'N STONES

A Full-Length Play  
by  
EV MILLER



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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EV MILLER

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(STICKS 'N STONES)

# STICKS 'N STONES

A Two-Act Play  
For Eleven Women, Nine Men, Extras\*

## CHARACTERS

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| DARLENE BRAND    | Rita Barklow's secretary |
| RITA BARKLOW     | school principal         |
| MRS. POTTER      | mother of student        |
| MATT COLLINS     | high school teacher      |
| TRINA COLLINS    | Matt's wife              |
| MARGIE WELCH     | high school teacher      |
| CAMMIE POTTER    | a student                |
| PETER MONTGOMERY | an attorney              |
| GINNY FARRELL    | a student                |
| GERALD SMALL     | a student                |
| SUSAN CARPENTER  | TV news reporter         |
| CAMERAPERSON     | TV cameraperson          |
| DOROTHY MARTIN   | journalist               |
| FIRST REPORTER   | media person             |
| SECOND REPORTER  | media person             |
| DON CARTER       | school superintendent    |
| BEATRICE GAYTON  | school board member      |
| JOHN MORRISON    | school board president   |
| CHARLES TRACY    | school board member      |
| LINDA STATON     | school board member      |
| ARNOLD NEUSTEL   | school board member      |
| LAWRENCE COOK    | an author                |

TIME: Today    PLACE: McCloud High School

\*Media People, Adults and High School Students.

Some of the minor speaking roles as well as the extras can be doubled, since they often appear briefly in only one scene. The number of extras used also can vary, using more or fewer as circumstances permit.

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *The basic set for Act I is RITA BARKLOW's office. It is a typical office of a school principal, not very fancy, but comfortable. A desk and chair with other chairs placed in front of the desk. A few framed certificates and plaques on the walls along with a map of school attendance boundaries. The desk itself has the usual: telephone, picture, books, etc.*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *RITA BARKLOW is behind the desk. She is an attractive, businesslike woman in her late forties. She wears glasses and is dressed in a stylish two-piece suit. After a moment, her secretary, DARLENE BRAND, enters from stage left. She closes the door behind her.*

BRAND. Mrs. Barklow?

BARKLOW (*looking up*). Yes, Darlene. . .

BRAND. There is a woman waiting to see you.

BARKLOW (*puzzled*). Well, all right. . . Why didn't you use the intercom?

BRAND. I wanted to come in and tell you. She looks upset.

BARKLOW. Oh? Well, I'm glad you did that, Darlene. Did she give you a name?

BRAND. Mrs. Potter.

BARKLOW. Potter? Do I know her?

BRAND. I'm not sure. I've never met her. She says she's Cammie Potter's mother.

BARKLOW. Cammie Potter?

BRAND. A junior. I know the girl. Fairly good student and never in trouble that I know of.

BARKLOW. Huh! I wonder what she wants.

BRAND. She didn't say, Mrs. Barklow. She just said she wanted to see the principal, but I've been your secretary long enough to know when a parent is upset.

BARKLOW. All right, Darlene. Send her in and we'll

find out for sure. Close the door when she gets in, will you?

BRAND. Yes... *(She exits. Her voice is heard offstage.)* Mrs. Barklow will see you now, Mrs. Potter.

*(BRAND ushers MRS. POTTER in and closes the door. MRS. POTTER is a well-dressed woman of about forty. She carries herself well and speaks in an educated manner.)*

BARKLOW. Mrs. Potter. *(She rises, offering her hand; MRS. POTTER takes it.)* Please, have a seat.

POTTER *(sitting)*. Thank you... I'm glad we finally met. I've heard so much about you.

BARKLOW *(smiling)*. Oh? Not all bad, I hope.

POTTER *(relaxing a bit)*. Oh, no! Not at all. Nearly everything I've heard has been good. You know, it isn't often that a woman is named principal of a high school. How long have you held this position?

BARKLOW. This is my third year. You're not from McCloud?

POTTER. No, we just moved in a year ago. My husband is a pediatrician with the McCloud Clinic.

BARKLOW. I see.

POTTER. Frankly, I was surprised and quite pleased when I heard there was a woman principal at McCloud High School. I thought it said a lot for this school system.

BARKLOW. Well, thank you. There have been one or two moments when I wondered why I wanted the job, but basically things have gone well.

POTTER. I'm quite sure that being a woman in this position requires a bit more work than might ordinarily be needed.

BARKLOW *(shrugging)*. Well, you know how it is... When you're number two, you have to try harder. *(A moment of silence.)* Mrs. Potter, what can I do for you? I appreciate your kind words, but I don't think you came in here just to compliment me.

POTTER. No, I didn't. I...I have a daughter who is a junior...Cammie Potter.

BARKLOW. Yes, I know. I understand she is a capable student.

POTTER. Yes... (*She is uncomfortable.*) Yes... Cammie is a fine girl. We've had no problems...at least no big ones so far. (*BARKLOW waits.*) I feel so stupid coming in here, Mrs. Barklow...at least, now that I'm here.

BARKLOW. Just tell me what's on your mind.

POTTER (*clearing her throat*). Well...you have to understand right from the beginning that I am no prude. My husband and I both have college educations and we know the value of coming into contact with all kinds of literature and ideas, but...

BARKLOW. But...

POTTER. Well, Cammie has been reading a book in her literature class that I am quite upset about.

BARKLOW. Oh? Who is the teacher?

POTTER. Mr. Collins.

BARKLOW. Matt? Matt Collins is one of our finest young teachers.

POTTER. Oh, I was afraid of that! Cammie likes him a lot, too.

BARKLOW. Then, what is the problem? You said it had to do with a book.

POTTER. Yes, the class is doing a modern American novel, called *McVey's Revival*.

BARKLOW (*shaking her head*). I guess I'm not familiar with the book.

POTTER. Neither was I...or my husband, and we both read a lot. But, the book is by an author named Cook...Lawrence Cook. It's a rather new novel.

BARKLOW. I see... Just what is it that bothers you about this book?

POTTER. Well...oh, now that I'm saying this, I feel so narrow-minded and judgmental. Ken...my husband and I talked about this for nearly an hour last night before we decided to come in to see you. Anyway, the book is about a man...McVey...who leaves his wife

and children and begins to lead the life of a single man... a rather *open-minded single man*, I would add.

BARKLOW. You mean, he begins to see other women.

POTTER. He not only sees other women, Mrs. Barklow, he sees other men as well.

BARKLOW (*eyebrows raised*). Oh? (*She leans forward to press intercom.*) Darlene, would you call Matt Collins room and ask him to step down here for a moment? (*She releases the button.*) Matt is just down the hall a couple of rooms. He should be here soon.

POTTER. Oh, I didn't want to cause him any trouble. Cammie likes him so much, but I just don't like what I've read in this book so far.

BARKLOW. What specifically are you upset about?

POTTER. Well, the language is quite strong, but basically I guess what Ken and I object to the most is the very vivid description of the...ah...bedroom scenes.

BARKLOW. I see. You've read the book then?

POTTER. Well, yes...at least most of it. I guess I would have to be honest and say I haven't read all of it.

BARKLOW. What about your husband, Dr. Potter?

POTTER. No, he's just read some of the passages, too. (*There is a knock at the door.*) Come in, Matt!

*(The door opens to admit MATTHEW COLLINS. He is a bright, nice-looking man of about thirty. He wears a sweater and open shirt, but his hair is cut fairly short and he looks very clean cut and somewhat nondescript.)*

COLLINS. You wanted to see me?

BARKLOW. Yes, Matt. Come in and sit down. Will your class be okay?

COLLINS. Sure. It's a good class and they're reading tomorrow's assignment.

BARKLOW. Matt, this is Mrs. Potter...Cammie Potter's mother.

COLLINS (*somewhat puzzled; he shakes her hand*). Mrs. Potter. Cammie is a fine student.

POTTER. Thank you. She likes you, too, Mr. Collins.

BARKLOW. Sit down, Matt.

COLLINS (*sitting*). What's the problem?

BARKLOW. Matt, Mrs. Potter is... somewhat... concerned about a book you are doing in class.

COLLINS. Oh!

BARKLOW. Yes, a book called *McVey's Revival*.

COLLINS (*angering*). I see...

POTTER. Please, Mr. Collins, I am not here to cause you trouble. I think you must be a fine teacher from all I've heard, but I have to tell you, I think *McVey's Revival* is a questionable choice as a classroom project.

COLLINS. Oh? Are you a literature teacher, Mrs. Potter?

BARKLOW. Matt!

POTTER (*flustered*). Well, I...of course I'm not...but I do know that such a book can be harmful to young minds.

COLLINS. In what way can it be harmful, Mrs. Potter?

POTTER. In many ways, (*She, too, is starting to get angry.*)

COLLINS. I guess I feel the only real harm to young minds is the lack of ideas.

POTTER. The *ideas* they can get from that book, Mr. Collins, could hardly be called beneficial. Unless, of course, homosexuality and promiscuity are the models we want our children to have.

COLLINS. Perhaps you think we should burn the book, Mrs. Potter.

POTTER. Well! I really expected just a bit more civilized discussion about this, Mrs. Barklow.

BARKLOW. And I agree. Matt, I don't think sarcasm is the answer here. Can't we talk about this problem intelligently?

COLLINS (*relenting*). Sorry...

BARKLOW. All right, let's go on from there. Mrs. Potter...

POTTER. Yes...well...as I was telling Mrs. Barklow

before you came in, Mr. Collins...my husband and I are not prudes. We try to be as open-minded as any parents and we certainly realize that keeping this type of literature from Cammie is not the answer. We know she is going to come in contact with all kinds of ideas in her life and she is going to have to make some choices. But, to require a book of this kind, to spend several weeks studying it in class, seems like questionable value to me.

BARKLOW. Tell me a little about the book, Matt. I haven't read it.

COLLINS (*clearing his throat*). Well... the main character's name is McVey. He's in his mid-forties and has been pretty much a straight arrow his entire life... you know, job, wife, kids, responsibilities...that kind of thing. Then, after a lot of soul-searching, he decides all of that is destroying him. He decides to get a divorce and lead a completely different lifestyle.

BARKLOW. Mrs. Potter says there are some pretty... uh... vivid... descriptions in the book.

COLLINS. You mean about sex?

BARKLOW (*uncomfortable*). Uh...yes...that's what I mean.

COLLINS. Certainly there are...but, I might add, nothing that these kids don't read everyday on their own, or even more to the point, nothing that they don't see more graphically in practically every movie they go to.

POTTER. I guess I don't object to that so much... I mean, the man/woman scenes...but, the others.

COLLINS. What others?

POTTER. The scenes between two men.

COLLINS. I see you *have* read the book. (*He is slightly sarcastic.*)

POTTER. Well, I am quite able to read, Mr. Collins. I will admit, however, that I have only read selected passages. I intend to read the entire book.

BARKLOW. What's the point of doing the book, Matt? You've had an okay from your department head?

COLLINS. Yes, I have. Marge okayed it last spring.

BARKLOW. Did she read it?

COLLINS. That I don't know. (*Thinking.*) No, I don't think she did.

BARKLOW. My other question, Matt...what's the point of the book?

COLLINS. Am I in trouble here, Mrs. Barklow?

BARKLOW. No, of course not, Matt. We just want to straighten this out.

POTTER. Please, Mr. Collins...I am not trying to stir up problems...I promise you that. I understand full well the value of academic freedom and no one would fight harder against the concept of book censorship than my husband and I. It is just that the book bothers me...quite a lot.

COLLINS. I see. (*He clears his throat.*) Well, let me try to explain. I guess it is my conviction, from the years I've taught and from personal experiences, that so many young people do not really give much thought to their lives...so many of them drift into jobs and into marriages and into a style of life that is more accidental than it is intentional. Even those who plan careers and plan marriages and plan children, many times do so for the wrong reasons.

BARKLOW. I don't follow...

COLLINS. Mrs. Barklow, so many of us... and them... choose, accidentally or otherwise, a kind of life that we have been told is the proper one. Everyone should marry; everyone should have children; everyone should have a mortgage on the house, buy a car every three years, use the credit cards. Then, so many find themselves in a life that's stifling and boring and desperate...and they want out. Do you realize that in my classes nearly half of my kids come from divorced homes?

POTTER. I realize that... and that is a terrible thing... but how is a book such as *McVey's Revival* going to help them? Other than to teach them to walk away from responsibility.

COLLINS (*slightly angry*). I don't want them to walk away from responsibility, Mrs. Potter. I just want

them to make the important decisions before they ever get into that situation. I want my students to make some conscious decisions. If they end up with the mortgage and the spouse and the two and a half kids, I want it to be a choice and not an accident.

POTTER. All that is admirable, Mr. Collins, but to advocate promiscuity and homosexuality as an alternative is hardly the answer.

COLLINS (*angry*). You are missing the point!

POTTER. I don't think I am! I think it would have been fine to recommend this book on a reading list as a choice, but to do it as a classroom project and insist that all students read it is not fair. After all, there are some of us who believe in those virtues you so readily criticize.

COLLINS. What virtues are those, Mrs. Potter?

POTTER. Marriage and children and home. . .

COLLINS. I value them, too, Mrs. Potter. I am married and have a small child. As for just recommending the book in a reading list, don't you think it would do more harm to have students read the book without some guidance and interpretation?

BARKLOW. Well, we can argue philosophy here all day. I think I'd like a copy of the book, Matt, so that I can read it. In the meantime, Mrs. Potter, why don't you and your husband read the complete book also? You and I both know that sometimes passages taken out of context can mean something entirely different than what they were intended.

COLLINS. I'll bring you a copy immediately.

BARKLOW. Thank you, Matt.

COLLINS. Am I to assume that there is a possibility that you will order me to stop teaching the book?

BARKLOW. Why don't we cross that bridge when we get to it. I want to read it first.

COLLINS. Then there is that possibility.

BARKLOW. Well, I think *order* might be a bit strong, Matt. After all of us have read the novel and get together again, perhaps we can reach some compromise.

COLLINS. I don't see how we can compromise on this.

Either I am able to teach the novel or I'm not - where is the in-between? I certainly don't think we should allow ourselves to get into a position where every parent who walks in this school can dictate what we can or cannot teach.

BARKLOW. Matt! I think you are going too far!

COLLINS (*angry now*). Don't you realize that some fault could be found with everything we teach? Perhaps we should stop teaching *Moby Dick* or *The Scarlet Letter*... after all, that one is about adultery...

POTTER. Mr. Collins, that is not fair!

COLLINS. You tell me what's fair about you coming in here...not even having read the book...and telling me...insinuating that I have chosen a work that is harming my students. As I recall from a paper Cammie wrote, your husband is a doctor. Do you think he would be receptive if I came to his office and told him how to practice medicine?

POTTER. That is hardly the same thing!

COLLINS. I think it is!

POTTER (*rising*). Well, I see no further point in continuing this. I came here with the best of intentions. I did not do it to hurt you or anyone else...but Cammie is my daughter and I will involve myself in whatever it is that goes into her mind just as I will concern myself with other things that involve her welfare. If she decides to use alcohol or drugs that will hurt her body, I will get involved...and I will do no less for something that might soil her mind.

COLLINS. Soil her mind! (*He stands also.*) *McVey's Revival* will soil her mind?

POTTER. Yes, I think it will!

BARKLOW (*rising and going around the desk*). Please! Let's all just cool off a bit. Read the book, Mrs. Potter and call me as soon as you have. I will try to read it in the next day or two.

POTTER (*looking at COLLINS; he glares back at her*). Yes...thank you for your time and consideration. You've been very kind. (*She nods coldly to COLLINS.*)

Mr. Collins... (*COLLINS does not answer; POTTER exits and COLLINS begins to follow.*)

BARKLOW. Matt, let's talk for a minute...shut the door.

COLLINS (*very angry*). I just see no reason that woman should—

BARKLOW (*not loud, but very stern*). Sit down, Matt! (*COLLINS sits.*) Matt, I do not think you handled that very well at all.

COLLINS. I should have expected you to say that... don't most administrators run scared every time a parent walks into the office?

BARKLOW. I'm going to forget you said that, Matt, because you know better and you're angry right now. You know very well I back my teachers when they're right.

COLLINS. Are you saying I'm not right in this case?

BARKLOW. I'm not saying that at all. I have not read the book yet, so I can't make a judgment. It may even be that after I've read it I will support your decision to teach it even if I think it was a bad choice. Academic freedom is important; even administrators are aware of that.

COLLINS. Okay, I'm sorry about that remark.

BARKLOW. I do wish, Matt, that you had warned me that you were doing a book that might be somewhat...controversial, so that I could have been prepared. You must have known that there would be people who would take exception to it. However, that is water under the bridge now. No, when I said that you handled it badly, I wasn't talking about the book. I was talking about Mrs. Potter. (*COLLINS begins to speak.*) Matt, you could see as well as I that this was not a lady who is narrow-minded or looking to find fault. She is an intelligent, educated woman who is concerned.

COLLINS. Well, what was I supposed to do? Give in to her?

BARKLOW. No, of course not. But, it would have been

better to perhaps not be quite so condescending to her.

You *were* condescending, Matt.

COLLINS. Was I?

BARKLOW. Yes.

COLLINS. Well, damn it! She made me mad!

BARKLOW. Why?

COLLINS. Why! Well, because...because she...she came in here demanding I stop teaching *McVey's Revival!*

BARKLOW. No, she didn't. She just wanted some answers. You know why *I* think you were so upset? (*No answer.*) I think it was simply because you were being criticized and you weren't able to take it. Matt, if I reacted that way every time a parent called to complain about something that's happening in this school, I'd be upset eight hours a day. You can't personalize it so much.

COLLINS (*rising*). Can't personalize it! How can I do otherwise? I chose that book.

BARKLOW. And don't you ever make mistakes?

COLLINS. Of course I do... Do you think I've made a mistake with *McVey's Revival?*

BARKLOW. I don't know... I haven't read it yet. You will bring a copy to me immediately...

COLLINS (*going to the door*). Sure...right away... You know, lots of parents do this kind of thing just to get it off their chests and then they forget about it. Mrs. Potter just might forget about the whole thing.

BARKLOW. I don't know... I hope you're right. Somehow, though, I get the idea that Mrs. Potter isn't the type who forgets so easily. (*Lights dim.*)