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*Dramatic Publishing*

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*

by

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Based on the Short Story by

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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

*A Play in One Act*

For Four Men and Three Women

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CHARACTERS

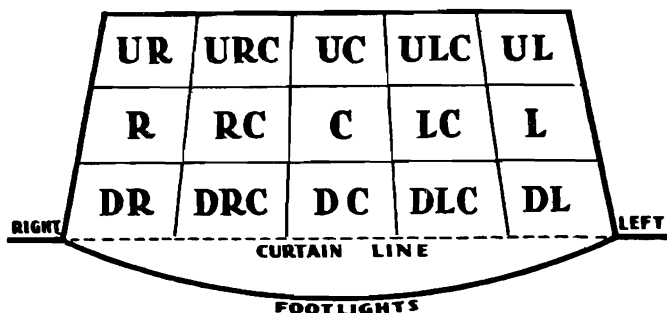
PEYTON FARQUHAR . . . . . *a southern civilian*  
WIFE  
CYNTHIA } . . . . . *their daughters*  
MARY ANN }  
SOLDIER } . . . . . *of the Union army*  
CAPTAIN }  
MAN . . . . . *narrator*

PLACE: *Northern Alabama.*

TIME: *During the Civil War.*

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## 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.

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**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.

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## An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

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The houselights dim off and a spot of light comes up in front of the curtain. The light reveals a MAN standing D L in front of the curtain dressed in dark clothes. His manner is gravely matter-of-fact, and he speaks deliberately.)

MAN. In northern Alabama at the time of the War Between the States, there was an occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge. (Pause.) In northern Alabama, and in the midst of life, a man stood on a railroad bridge looking down into the water of Owl Creek twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. (Pause.) The man who was engaged in being hanged was a civilian, his features good, and he had a kindly expression. Evidently, this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded. Peyton Farquhar was his name of an old and highly respected Alabama family, and as might be expected, devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth. Peyton chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release

of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile, he did what he could. No service was too humble, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and in war.

(The curtain is rising.)

MAN. One evening shortly before Peyton Farquhar waited on his unsteadfast footing over Owl Creek, he sat with his wife on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds. His two daughters were coming from the house bringing a little surprise they'd prepared for their parents. A little farther away, a dusty gray-clad soldier approached, the hoof beats of his horse not yet quite heard.  
(The MAN steps offstage L.)

(PEYTON FARQUHAR, wearing planter's clothes, has been revealed sitting on a rustic bench L C with his lovely WIFE beside him. She wears a simple but attractive dress of the period. They both appear to be listening intently. After holding this an instant, they both relax.)

WIFE (smiles and takes his hand). All I hear are frogs, crickets and 'way off--it might've been a mockingbird.

PEYTON. I was sure I heard something.

WIFE. Anytime there's a little thunderstorm over in the next county you think it's Yankee cannons

---

and traipse off to investigate.

PEYTON (getting up; his smile is broader but it doesn't quite conceal his restlessness). And come back sopping wet. (He crosses to R C, his manner having a caged quality. He looks off R.)

WIFE (watching him, concerned). Wet or dry-- you've come back. That's the important thing.

PEYTON (impatiently). The important thing is what I do, and I should do more. I should contribute--I should---

WIFE (interrupting). You've already done more than many men in uniform.

PEYTON (sharply). I haven't done enough.

WIFE. How much is enough, Peyton?

PEYTON (struggling to reach an idea). Enough is...I'd like to do enough so that I'd know-- know that men will--will fight to defend----

WIFE (crossing to him). How will what you do or don't do prove what other men----

PEYTON. I'm an ordinary fellow, and if I do everything I can, that proves others will, too. (Smiles.) At least it proves it to me.

WIFE (perplexed). I still don't see.

PEYTON. I'll know because I'll have done it. But if I don't do my part, how can I be sure whether anyone, anywhere----(He interrupts himself, turning quickly to look off U L, and listening intently.)

WIFE (hushed). What is it?

PEYTON (tensely). Now I'm sure I heard something. (Gestures.) Over there.

(They look off U L with increasing tension. Then suddenly two laughing girls, CYNTHIA and MARY ANN, wearing attractive country clothes of the period, rush on U L. MARY ANN carries



a covered dish.)

CYNTHIA. Surprise!

MARY ANN. Surprise! Surprise!

PEYTON (shaking his head and laughing). Daughters.

WIFE. Honestly.

CYNTHIA. You didn't hear us coming?

WIFE. I didn't, but your father's a skillful hunter,  
and he heard you from 'way off.

MARY ANN. Did you, Papa?

PEYTON. My, no. You were stealthy as field  
mice.

MARY ANN (to her mother). There! He didn't  
hear us!

PEYTON (admiringly). I can't imagine how you  
managed to come so quietly.

CYNTHIA. We're daughters of a skillful hunter.

WIFE. What've you brought? That dish--it's---

CYNTHIA (confirming). From the good china,  
Mama--what's left of it.

MARY ANN. Because we made something special.

CYNTHIA. You and Papa sit on the bench, and  
we'll have our surprise.

MARY ANN (taking off the covering). A shortcake!

And we'll sit here together--and we'll eat it.

WIFE (amused). How could you make a shortcake  
with no sugar?

MARY ANN. We found some in a cannister on the  
top shelf.

WIFE (startled). I was saving the sugar in the  
cannister. That's the last!

PEYTON (seating her on bench with a flourish).

What better way to use it--a shortcake made by  
our daughters. And we'll sit here together--  
and we'll eat it. (They are arranging them-  
selves around the bench.)