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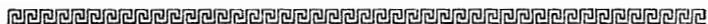
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*Dramatic Publishing*



A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

# Inadmissible Evidence

BY

JOHN OSBORNE



*THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY*



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## CAST

The cast from the play as produced at the Belasco Theatre, New York.

BILL MAITLAND.....*Nicol Williamson*  
HUDSON.....*Peter Sallis*  
JONES.....*Ted van Griethuysen*  
SHIRLEY.....*Jeanne Hepple*  
JOY.....*Lois Daine*  
MRS. GARNSEY.....*Madeleine Sherwood*  
JANE MAITLAND.....*Jill Townsend*  
LIZ.....*Valerie French*

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# ACT ONE

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**SCENE:** The location where a dream takes place. A site of helplessness, of oppression and polemic. The structure of this particular dream is the bones and dead objects of a solicitor's office. It has a desk, files, papers, dust, books, leather arm-chairs, a large, Victorian coat stand, and the skeleton of an outer office with clerks, girls and a telephonist. Downstage is a prisoner's dock. At back, high above the outer office, hangs the Royal Coat of Arms. In front of this are the green benches of one of the High Courts of Justice.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** The prisoner of this dream, **BILL MAITLAND**, stands in the dock. One of Her Majesty's **JUDGES** sits at the bench. From C, a **CLERK** of the Court reads the indictment. Before this there has been an air of floating inertia before the three actors come to some sort of life out of the blur of dream.)

## CLERK

William Henry Maitland, you are accused of having unlawfully and wickedly published and made known, and caused to be procured and made known, a wicked, bawdy and scandalous object. Intending----

Object?

BILL

JUDGE

Proceed, proceed.

CLERK

Object. Intending to vitiate and corrupt the morals of the liege subjects of our Lady the Queen, to debauch and poison the minds of divers of the liege subjects of our Lady and to raise and create in them lustful desires, and to bring the liege subjects into a state of wickedness, lewdness and debauchery. How do you plead? Guilty or Not Guilty?

BILL

Not guilty.  
(Pause)

CLERK

Place your right hand on the book and repeat after me: I swear by Almighty God----

BILL

I swear . . . My Lord, I wish to affirm.

JUDGE

Very well.

CLERK

Do you swear and affirm?

BILL

I swear and affirm . . .  
(Pause)

I hereby swear and affirm. Affirm. On my . . . Honor? By my belief. My belief in . . . in . . . the technological revolution, the pressing, growing, pressing, urgent need for more and more scientists, and more scientists, for more and more schools and

universities and universities and schools, the theme of change, realistic decisions based on a highly developed and professional study of society by people who really know their subject, the overdue need for us to adapt ourselves to different conditions, the theme and challenge of such rapid change, change, rapid change.

(Flails. The JUDGE looks at him reassuringly and he picks up again)

In the inevitability of automation and the ever-increasing need, need, oh, need, for the stable ties of modern family life, rethinking, reliving, making way for the motor car, forty million by nineteen; in a forward-looking, outward-looking, program controlled machine tool line reassessment. With, yes, with faculties of memory and judgment far beyond the capacity of any human grief, being. Or any group of humans who has ever lived.

(Pause)

JUDGE

Yes?

BILL

In the facts, above all the fact, inescapable. Anna, my wife, Hudson, I mean my managing clerk, Hudson, Joy, the telephonist, the enrichment of our standard of living, I've lost my prescription, Jane, my father's too old to be here, thank God, the National Research, Research Development Council, the Taylor Report, the Nayler Report, failure report, and a projected budget of five hundred thousand million, millions for this purpose, the practical dangers of pre-marital in the commanding heights of our declining objects.

JUDGE

Objects?

BILL

Objects? I think so, My Lord. I think that's what I meant to be saying.

(Continuing)

Facing up realistically, the issues that are important, really, central, social change, basic, burning issues.

JUDGE

I think that is evident.

BILL

I wish I could see more clearly.

JUDGE

Very well.

(Pause)

CLERK

My Lord, I have been retained by the defendant. However, after long discussion with myself and my learned colleagues, he has expressed his intention of conducting his own case.

JUDGE

I see. You have tried to dissuade him from this course?

CLERK

We have, My Lord. He is quite adamant.

JUDGE

Mr. Maitland, you must be fully aware of the implication of your decision?

BILL

Yes.



JUDGE

It is my duty to warn you of the difficulties that may be involved in discarding the services of learned counsel.

BILL

I see that. Except I wish I *could*.

JUDGE

And to warn you against taking an irrevocable decision which will almost certainly . . .

BILL

But I'm incapable of making decisions.

JUDGE

Involve you in onerous difficulties. Even though, as a practicing solicitor of, I believe, some standing and experience, you are no doubt better equipped to conduct yourself than would ordinarily be the case.

(BILL smiles)

I put it to you now, once and for all: Do you persist in this decision?

BILL

(Looks at CLERK)

I do, My Lord.

JUDGE

Very well.

(Pause)

Proceed.

BILL

I beg your pardon?

JUDGE

Carry on, Mr. Maitland.

BILL

Me, My Lord?

JUDGE

Yes. You, Mr. Maitland.

BILL

But what about them?

JUDGE

Are you--or are you not conducting your own case?

BILL

But them? What about them?

JUDGE

Mr. Jones will, I believe, lead for the prosecution.

CLERK

That is correct, My Lord.

JUDGE

Come then. Do let us get on.

BILL

He was supposed to be defending me.

JUDGE

Mr. Maitland. Have we not, just a few moments ago, established that you had dismissed Mr. Jones?  
(CLERK goes out UR)

BILL

Yes.

JUDGE

And that you have elected to conduct your own de-

fense?

BILL

Well, it is. I did. But then it shouldn't be me.

JUDGE

Shouldn't be you?

BILL

No.

JUDGE

What shouldn't be you?

BILL

Well, if it is. Why isn't he starting off then?

JUDGE

Starting off?

BILL

Yes.

(Pause)

JUDGE

You have already started off.

(BILL ponders)

BILL

But--he should have started off first. In the very first place.

(Pause)

JUDGE

That is true. However . . . *you* have done so instead.

BILL

But what about the . . . last word.

JUDGE

That is my ruling. It is possible that it may be reversed or re-interpreted at another time elsewhere.

BILL

(Bafflement; trying to focus)

I ought to: have: the last word.

JUDGE

No doubt, we shall see in the event.

BILL

What event? I'm here, aren't I?

JUDGE

You must be aware, with your training and background, that the law can often be very flexible in these matters.

BILL

As Your Lordship pleases. As you say, it probably makes very little difference.

JUDGE

Demonstrably.

BILL

Before I----

JUDGE

Yes:

BILL

May I have a glass of water?

(The JUDGE motions to the CLERK, who has entered from DR, who obliges. BILL tries to study his face)

BILL

My Lord--which one is Mr. Jones?

JUDGE

There.

(He indicates the CLERK a little impatiently. The CLERK hands BILL the glass of water. After drink CLERK goes out UR.)

BILL

Please forgive me. I have rather a headache. Perhaps that's why I'm here now. I had too much to drink last night, that's just the simple truth of it. Well, when I say that, I mean not much more than I usually have. Most nights. But that's--well, I do drink quite a lot. Quite a lot? Oh, anyway, I'm what you'd call a serious drinker. That's to say, I just don't mess about once I get going--when I do. When I do? I nearly always do. I can drink a whole bottle of whisky. Can't be any good for the heart, can it? It must be a strain, pumping all that fire and damned rigor and everything all out again? Still, I'm pretty strong. I must be. Otherwise, I couldn't take it. That is, if I *can* take it. I can't, I'm sorry, I can't find my pills. I always have three or so in my ticket pocket. So sorry.

(Pause)

Just a moment. The glands or whatever these lumps are in my neck feel as if they were trying to batter their way out. Just here, trying to force their way out. Like broken marbles, real big gob stoppers. With chipped edges. I must have left them in my overcoat pocket. Do you think the constable could get my overcoat or look in the left-hand pocket? Or

the inside? It shouldn't take a moment. Only. It's a bit like a gimlet, too. Right up behind the eyeballs. And that and the marbles, too.

(Pause)

I know that none of this is very interesting to you, but the fact is I could do a lot better, a lot better, that is, acquit myself, acquit myself better. Yes. Well, they don't seem to be there, my pills. Or tablets or whatever you call them. What's the difference? Only: I really do need three of them at least. And nothing else will do the job properly. Then, if I keep my head upright and don't move it about too much, and talk fairly slowly, if you can bear with me, with your Lordship's indulgence, I can make some sort of start.

JUDGE

Please.

BILL

And see what comes to me. In the event. Now: I wish I could open my eyes. My eyelids. They're like oysters. However, this is my concern and not yours. I'll think of something.

(He presses his eyeballs)

My name is William Henry Maitland. I am thirty-nine years old, practicing solicitor and commissioner for oaths at 34, Fleet Chambers, E. C. 3. I have worked in the service of the law--if you can call being a solicitor, working in the service of the law --for nearly twenty-five years. In fact, I started work in this very office, this court, since I was at least fifteen. Perhaps earlier. That--

(Points to Judge's seat)

--is my old boss's chair. You see, I took his position over from him. My managing clerk, old Hudson, he was working for the old man even then. Not that

he was much older than me. He just always seemed older. Anyway, he works for me now. I don't even know why I took up the law. I don't think there was any reason at all much. I can't think of any now, and I couldn't think of any then. Perhaps I did think I might land up on the bench even. Or with learned counsel. Mr. Jones. No, but I never seriously thought of myself being brilliant enough to sit in that company, with those men, among any of them with their fresh complexions from their playing fields and all that, with their ringing, effortless voice production and their quiet chambers, and tailors and mess bills and Oxford Colleges and going to the opera God knows where and the 400, whatever I used to think that was. I can't remember at the time. I have always been tolerably bright.

JUDGE

Always been?

BILL

Bright. *Only* tolerably bright, My Lord. But, to start with, and potentially and finally, that is to say, irredeemably mediocre. Even at fifteen, when I started out in my profession. Oh, no, before that. Before that. Mark. I knew that in order to become even a small market-place solicitor, as distinct even from a first-rate managing clerk with a big, substantial firm, I should have to study very hard indeed for my, oh, for my Law Society examinations all the while I was picking up probate and conveyancing, running out for jugs of tea, packets of fags for the other clerks or calling in at the chemist for the telephonist.

JUDGE

Telephonist.

BILL

I'm afraid there's always one like that, My Lord. Mine is called Joy. The one who works for me now, that is. This one was called Jill.

JUDGE

Is anything the matter?

BILL

I seem to have lost my drift, My Lord. What's my wife doing here? Well, she would be here, of course. No, it's Sheila, it's my ex-wife. I didn't even know where she was. How did she know? They all seem to *find out* about these things. They find out. I'm sure my old man's there, but I can't see him. I hope not. He'll hate this. I seem to have lost my drift, My Lord.

JUDGE

(Kindly)

Mediocrity?

BILL

Well: it might perhaps be misleading to you and everyone to dwell on it too much. I merely wanted to draw your attention.

JUDGE

There is time enough, Mr. Maitland.

BILL

I have always had a certain facility, it's true. But little else. A fairly quick mind, not profound, a bit flashy, I should say, indeed, *you* would say, not even that, a little more than perky. They said I had a quick mind. A quick mind, they said, was useful, not that I had it, but helpful, as Your Lordship will



know, in a profession where time doesn't mean a thing to anyone except some poor bloody agonized client who wants to know whether he's going to get the house he wants, an overdraft, or a divorce, eighteen months or a fine. However, however, My Lord. I seem to retain very little. Very little indeed, hardly anything at all, in fact. Which is disturbing. Because I don't see how I can carry on my work even--well, I am carrying on with it, but I must be getting less and less any good at it. *Even* my work, that's almost the least of it, which is probably, no doubt, one of the reasons I find myself here, in the dark dock arraigned before you. I am almost forty years old, and I know I have never made a decision which I didn't either regret, or suspect was just plain commonplace or shifty or scamped and indulgent or mildly stupid or undistinguished. As you must see. As for why I am here, I have to confess this: I have to confess that: that I have depended almost entirely on other people's efforts. Anything else would have been impossible for me, and I always knew in my own heart that only it was that kept me alive and functioning at all, let alone making decisions or being quick-minded and all that nonsense about me. . . . And then, then I have always been afraid of being found out.

JUDGE

Found out?

BILL

Yes.

JUDGE

Found out about what?

BILL

I'm sorry, My Lord. I don't understand. I have

always been quite certain that this is where I should end up, here. I've seen it too many times, with you there and counsel over there. There. And there. Down to the cells. Off to the Scrubs, hand over your watch and your money, take all your clothes off, have a bath, get examined, take all your clothes off in the cold, and the door shut behind you. I should like to stand down if I may. I am not feeling very well. I never hoped or wished for anything more than to have the good fortune of friendship and the excitement and comfort of love, and the love of women in particular. I made a set at both of them in my own way. With the first, with friendship, I hardly succeeded at all. Not really. No. Not at all. With the second, with love, I succeeded, I succeeded in inflicting, quite certainly inflicting, more pain than pleasure. I am not equal to any of it. But I can't escape it, I can't forget it. And I can't begin again. You see?

(A torpid moan escapes him)

(Fade. The light remains on BILL. The JUDGE and the CLERK leisurely take off their wigs and robes, coming into the office area, hanging them on the upstage end of the coat stand. The JUDGE, who is HUDSON, the managing clerk, speaks to the CLERK, who is called JONES. During this, BILL remains still. The actor has to indicate the painful struggle into consciousness without, at the same time, making the physical metaphor too explicit: the difficulty of breathing, the violent inner effort to throw off the burden, the fishy, palpitating struggle of the heart being landed into wakefulness. The gasping will takes over. The dream, the prison of embryonic helplessness.)

ness, for the moment recedes, but not altogether. The focus fades on BILL, who emerges slowly out of it. Presently, he makes his way out of it, into the outer office [which is behind a scrim], then through it into his own office)

HUDSON

(To JONES)

Parky this morning.

JONES

Yes.

HUDSON

What's the matter then? Late night?

JONES

No, not specially.

HUDSON

How's that girl of yours?

JONES

Okay.

HUDSON

Still getting married?

JONES

Suppose so. Got to get these finals out of the way first. Hardly see her except on Sundays.

(SHIRLEY, the secretary, comes in with post and hands it to HUDSON)

SHIRLEY

There's yours.

HUDSON

Thank you, Shirley. And how are you today?

SHIRLEY

Looking forward to Friday night, thank you.

JONES

Is mine there?

SHIRLEY

Why don't you try looking for it?  
(Goes out)

HUDSON

What's up with her?

JONES

Dunno. Packing it in, she says.

HUDSON

What, again?

JONES

I think she means it this time.

(BILL comes into outer office fairly briskly)

BILL

Morning, all!

JONES

Better start getting it sorted out myself then.

BILL

(Coming in)

Sorry I'm late.