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Dramatic Publishing

OPEN HOUSE AT HIGHTOWER U.

A Semi-serious Comedy in One Act

By

JOSEPH ROBINETTE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

OPEN HOUSE AT HIGHTOWER U.

A Play for 8 to 12 actors (10 recommended)*

Flexible casting: 4 to 6 m., 4 to 6 w.

CHARACTERS

DR. MARION MERTLEMEISTER college director of
admissions

DR. LEONA LEONOWSKI associate director of
admissions

DR. STAN I. SLAVSKY a drama director

DR. ANTOINETTE PERRYWINKLE Dr. Slavsky's
colleague

COLLEGE STUDENTS (6 to 8) . . . members of the drama
class

*It is suggested that the same actor play Dr. Mertlemeister/
Dr. Slavsky and that the same actress play Dr. Leonowski/
Dr. Perrywinkle.

While 8 students are suggested, the play can be performed
by 6 students through redistribution of lines as necessary.

OPEN HOUSE AT HIGHTOWER U.

SETTING: The action takes place on the actual stage of the auditorium in which the play is being performed. Two lecterns are at DL and DR respectively. On stage are several folding chairs and two or three small tables which will be used throughout the play. As the curtain rises and/or the lights come up on the stage, DR. MERTLEMEISTER is standing at—or enters and goes to—the DR lectern. He holds several notes to which he occasionally refers.

DR. MERTLEMEISTER. Good morning (afternoon or evening), everyone—especially to you high school seniors. Also to the parents, siblings and friends who may have accompanied you today. All are welcome here at Hightower University for our annual open house and campus tour. I am Dr. Marion T. Mertlemeister, Head of Student Life, and this is my colleague, Dr. Leona Leonowski.

(DR. LEONOWSKI enters carrying a briefcase or notebook and crosses to the DL lectern.)

DR. LEONOWSKI. Thank you, Dr. Mertlemeister. And I, too, welcome you to Hightower U.

DR. MERTLEMEISTER. As you know, this is the first of several sessions you'll be attending today, rotating with other visiting groups. Other sessions will include Academics, Housing, Clubs and Organizations and Financial Aid.

DR. LEONOWSKI. Before we begin this session, however, we'd like to toot Hightower's horn a bit, as it were, since we know that some of you have not yet applied to our fine university. We are ranked in the top ten schools of our size by all the major publications including *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Omar Jessup's College Guide for High School Grads and Their Moms and Dads*.

DR. MERTLEMEISTER. And, of course, our singular unique feature that sets us above all other institutions of higher learning—every single member of our university faculty and staff must hold a doctorate degree. No exceptions.

(An actor who will later portray a student enters as a JANITOR pushing a broom. He stops momentarily and looks at the audience.)

JANITOR *(plainly)*. Ph.D. Notre Dame. 1994.

DR. MERTLEMEISTER *(as the JANITOR exits pushing the broom)*. Thank you, Barney... Our Student Life session today is one that should be of interest to all of you seniors who are fresh off your winter break and just beginning your final semester of high school. I will now turn the proceedings over to Dr. Leonowski for a fuller explanation. Unfortunately, I must return to my office for a disciplinary hearing. Last semester four of our Phi

Beta Kappa students were caught trying to sneak into the library after hours to study for final exams.

DR. LEONOWSKI. One of our most serious infractions in years.

DR. MERTLEMEISTER. So, I must go. I hope to return before the session is over. Again, welcome to Hightower U. ...Dr. Leonowski— (*He exits.*)

DR. LEONOWSKI. Thank you, Dr. Mertlemeister. (*Calling after him.*) Good luck at the hearing. And just remember—Phi Beta Kappas will be Phi Beta Kappas. (*To the audience.*) Incidentally, if any of you should ever be called into a disciplinary hearing while you're here, Dr. Mertlemeister usually follows the hearing with ice cream and cake for all. It's the Hightower way... Now, we are ready for today's Student Life session which begins with "The Causes and Prevention of Senioritis"—a condition that tends to strike many high school seniors, especially during their final semester. Some of you may even now be experiencing one or more of the symptoms. And to demonstrate a few of those symptoms we call upon the Advanced Acting Class of the Drama Department here at Hightower U. Thespians, if you will!

(*She sits as the 1ST STUDENT enters.*)

1ST STUDENT (*in "light" rap style*).

When the last semester has just begun,

You must watch out for symptom number one.

2ND STUDENT (*entering, continuing the rap rhythm as will those who follow*).

Twelve long years from kindergarten up

They've tried to make me smarten up.

If it hasn't worked by now, it's a little too late.

So from here on out, I'm gonna celebrate.

3RD STUDENT (*entering*).

You may scoff at symptom number two,

But try not to let it happen to you.

4TH STUDENT (*entering*).

I got a B-plus average—a cause to rejoice.

And I hope it gets me in the college of my choice.

I've heard they don't count your last grade report,

So the rest of the year I'm gonna cavort.

1ST STUDENT.

Be careful or you might very well be

A victim of symptom number three.

5TH STUDENT (*entering*).

I know I should study for my mid-term test,

But my brain and my body could use a long rest.

You see, I'm the captain of our baseball (softball)
team.

The state championship is now my dream.

3RD STUDENT.

A common situation we now explore

Is senioritis symptom number four.

6TH STUDENT (*entering*).

I finally got my license, now I need some wheels.

I want my own car just to see how it feels.

I'll work after school, to heck with my studies.

I'll be giving rides to all my buddies.

1ST STUDENT.

Every single senior should now really strive

To try and avoid symptom number five.

7TH STUDENT (*entering*).

When the snow soon melts, before very long,

Out and about's where I belong.

If a certain girl (boy) smiles at me this spring,

That's the subject *I'll* be studying.

3RD STUDENT.

Our final symptom can leave you in a fix.

So don't be beguiled by big number six.

8TH STUDENT (*entering*).

I'm not a good student, I really won't lie.

I've always done enough just to get by.

I'm sure I'll graduate, so I'll relax.

The rest of the year can fall through the cracks.

7TH and 8TH STUDENTS.

Through the cracks.

5TH, 6TH, 7TH and 8TH STUDENTS.

Through the cracks.

ALL STUDENTS (*except 1ST and 3RD*).

Through the cracks!

Through the cracks, Jack!

Through the cracks, Jack!

Through the cracks, Jack!

2ND STUDENT (*breaking the rhythm*).

Come on now—

(*After a brief pause, back in rhythm.*)

It's not bronchitis or appendicitis.

4TH STUDENT.

Not neuritis or even tonsillitis.

5TH STUDENT.

Not arthritis, not even pharyngitis.

6TH STUDENT.

It's a harmless affliction.

7TH STUDENT.

A simple addiction.

8TH STUDENT.

Like it or not.

2ND STUDENT.

It's what we've got.

2ND and 4TH STUDENT.

Senioritis!

2ND, 4TH and 5TH STUDENTS.

Senioritis!

2ND, 4TH, 5TH and 6TH STUDENTS.

Senioritis!

2ND, 4TH, 5TH, 6TH, 7TH and 8TH STUDENTS.

Senioritis!

(They look at 1ST and 3RD STUDENTS who, after a moment, shrug and join in.)

ALL STUDENTS *(stretching it out)*.

Se—nior—i—tis!

(They form a “big finish” tableau as DR. LEONOWSKI stands and begins to applaud. Almost immediately the voice of DR. SLAVSKY is heard from offstage.)

DR. SLAVSKY'S VOICE. No, no! Stop that! Stop that!

(He rushes on, waving his arms in mock anger.) No applause! No applause! Not for these senioritises! (The STUDENTS react with mock fear. DR. LEONOWSKI, playing her part, meekly sits down.)

(NOTE: It is suggested that DR. SLAVSKY be played by the same actor who plays DR. MERTLEMEISTER. There should be little attempt to hide this fact from the

audience. DR. SLAVSKY might wear an obviously fake beard and perhaps over-sized, horn-rimmed glasses. He may wear a lab coat or an academic robe—along with cap and tassel—which can easily and quickly cover the costume which the actor wears as DR. MERTLE-MEISTER. DR. SLAVSKY is played as an older, yet spry, man with an accent—or a variety of accents—the thicker the better, though he should always be clearly understood.)

DR. SLAVSKY. No cheering, please. I will now interrogate each of these senioritisers to determine the outcome of his or her final semester swoon as previously admitted to. (*To 2ND STUDENT.*) You—first.

2ND STUDENT. I—I cut several classes—and even a few days that last semester. It may have cost me a pretty good job with the city parks department. I didn't know they were going to contact the school about my attendance record. Doesn't everybody cut the last semester of senior year? They outta know that. (*2ND STUDENT turns away as DR. SLAVSKY goes to the 4TH STUDENT.*)

DR. SLAVSKY. You.

4TH STUDENT. I was accepted by the top college of my choice. On condition. The condition was my final semester grades. Somebody told me they didn't count those grades... As a result, I got accepted to the *third* college of my choice. (*4TH STUDENT turns away as DR. SLAVSKY goes to the 5TH STUDENT.*)

DR. SLAVSKY. Next.

5TH STUDENT. The good news is we won the state championship, and I got a partial scholarship at a good university. The bad news is—I missed out on a *full* scholar-

ship at a *great* university. (5TH STUDENT turns away as DR. SLAVSKY goes to 6TH STUDENT.)

DR. SLAVSKY. And you?

6TH STUDENT. I got a job and bought a ten-year-old Chevy. It's always in the shop getting fixed, so I don't even have enough money left for fuel. Have you seen the price of gas these days? (6TH STUDENT turns away as DR. SLAVSKY goes to 7TH STUDENT.)

DR. SLAVSKY. And what about you?

7TH STUDENT. That girl (boy) I mentioned. We started dating. It got pretty serious. We did everything together. We even studied together. She (he) would study the books and I would study her (him). I failed two courses that last semester. Had to make them up in summer school. Bummer. (7TH STUDENT turns away as DR. SLAVSKY goes to 8TH STUDENT.)

DR. SLAVSKY. And finally—you.

8TH STUDENT. I let the rest of the year slip through the cracks all right. While I was cutting classes, I got mixed up with some older kids who had a different meaning for the word "crack." I never did any hard stuff, I swear. But I did have some weed on me the night of the bust. They came down pretty hard on some of those kids. I was lucky. The lawyers did a plea bargain for me. Four hundred hours of community service. I also had to get a full-time job to help my folks pay for the lawyers. Man, those guys charge a lot of money. (8TH STUDENT turns away. All except 1ST and 3RD STUDENTS now have their backs to the audience.)

DR. SLAVSKY (to 1ST and 3RD STUDENTS who are looking ahead piously). And why are you two still facing the audience?

1ST STUDENT. We were merely serving as narrators.

3RD STUDENT. We have nothing to be ashamed of.

DR. SLAVSKY. Oh, no? Just as I was entering, I saw you join in the final choral chant. Complicity—even in small amounts—is culpable. Turn, turn please. Face the back wall. (*1ST and 3RD STUDENTS sheepishly turn away.*) And there you have it. A few examples of the symptoms and results of a most malevolent malady. But, as they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So avoid, at all costs, the temptations of that singular sinister syndrome—

(The STUDENTS quickly turn and form another tableau.)

STUDENTS. —Senioritis!

DR. LEONOWSKI. Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Stan I. Slavsky and his Advanced Acting Class.

DR. SLAVSKY (*to the audience*). Now you may applaud. (*DR. LEONOWSKI leads the applause.*) Thank you, thank you very much.

DR. LEONOWSKI. And now, at this time, I shall turn things over to Dr. Slavsky and his talented troupe who will present more scenes from the life of the high school senior. For I must now return to the Student Life Center and cover for Dr. Mertlemeister while he's in the disciplinary hearing. I, too, hope to return before the session is over. Dr. Slavsky, it's all yours. (*She exits.*)

DR. SLAVSKY. Thank you, Dr. Leonowski... And thank you, audience, for your kind reception. Would you believe these terrific kids put together that opening them-

selves? I'm not sure I care for the style of style. What do you call that again?

1ST STUDENT. Rap.

DR. SLAVSKY. Oh, yes. Wrap. Is that like the wrap you put dead fish in?

2ND STUDENT. No—rap. R-A-P.

DR. SLAVSKY. I see. But I still don't understand it. Of course, I'm of another generation. I'm in my late thirties, you know... Well. Let us continue... Even those students who are diligent, who study hard and do not fall victim to senioritis, sometimes find other stumbling blocks in their way during that final year of high school. Witness the young man who, in his very last semester, has never had a date. But at long last, he tries to remedy the situation. (*To the STUDENTS.*) Places, please. (*Aside, in a lower voice.*) But no rap this time. (*Full voice again.*) Action.

(*Two STUDENTS come DC.*)

MALE STUDENT (NATE) (*a bit nervous, to BRANDI*).

Hi, Brandi... Will you, uh—uh, that is—will you go to the prom with me?

FEMALE STUDENT (BRANDI). Sorry, Nate. Danny already asked me. I'm going with *him*. (*She leaves.*)

NATE. Darn.

DR. SLAVSKY. The first rejection is somewhat like a—paper cut. Hurts a little. But doesn't last long—especially when Nathan decides to ask another lady to the prom.

NATE (*to a FEMALE STUDENT—CAMILLE*). Hello, Camille. Will—will you go to the prom with me?