

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER

By
JULIE JENSEN



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MM by
JULIE JENSEN
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER)

ISBN: 1-58342-016-9

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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

To Amy Louise Knowles Farrer, 1913-1993.

Production and Publication History

Commission: Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, Calif..

Professional Staged Readings: Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles; ASK Theatre Projects, Los Angeles; Playwrights, Center, Minneapolis, Minn.; Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts, New York City; and John Houseman Theater, New York City.

Workshop Productions: Common Ground Festival sponsored by ASK Theatre Projects, Los Angeles; Carnegie Mellon Showcase of New Plays, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Mill Mountain Theatre Festival of New Works, Roanoke, Va.

Professional Productions: Salt Lake Acting Company, Salt Lake City, Utah; Key West Theatre Festival, Key West, Fla.; Theatre-Works, Hartford, Conn.; Fringe Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland; Hudson Guild Theatre, Los Angeles.

Prizes: Mill Mountain Theatre New Play Competition, Roanoke; American Theatre Critics Association (nomination).

Publications: “Deer on a Wire” (Scene IV) Parabasis, 1996; “Deer on a Wire” (Scene IV) Kenyon Review, 1997.

* * * *

Acknowledgment

This play owes a debt to Frank Dwyer, Mead Hunter, Steve Campo, David Mong, James Martin, Hope Alexander and to dozens of actors and directors who were a part of its development.

LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER was produced at TheatreWorks, Hartford, Connecticut, January 16 to February 22, 1998. The production was directed by Steve Campo and included the following artists:

CAST

Dot JAYNE HOUDYSHELL
Ma ROSEMARY PRINZ
Sis VALERIE WRIGHT

PRODUCTION STAFF

Set Design MICHAEL SCHWELKARDT
Lighting Design DEBORAH CONSTANTINE
Costume Design MARGARET CARBONNEAU
Sound Design MARTY FEGY
Stage Manager PETER DURGIN
Production Manager ANDREA BLOSE
Technical Director DAVID DURBIN
Design for program, posters and flyers DON CARTER
Photograph LANNY NAGLER

LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER

For 3 Women

CHARACTERS

DOT: In her middle years, heavyset, with an easy sense of humor who finds herself in the middle of something not very funny.

MA: In her declining years, thin and frail, completely used to having her way.

SIS: Close to Dot's age, positive, upbeat, an authority on everything

Running time: 75 minutes

A NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT

The arrow sign (>) in the script indicates a line spoken directly to MA. Other unmarked lines from DOT are narration.

It is quite possible that some of the narrative lines will duplicate particular pieces of business. Feel free to cut an occasional line of narration when it seems merely redundant of what we may have seen.

LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER

Scene I: “Sassing Sister”

(Lights up on MA sitting at a table. She is recreating a time from her past as a teacher. DOT is her student.)

MA. Whistling **white** **whippets**
Whirling **wherever**.
What does it mean **when**
Whippets are **whirling**?
All the **while** **whistling**
When they are **whizzing**?
What is the meaning?
All together now, say it with me:

(DOT joins in haltingly.)

Whistling **white** **whippets**
Whirling **wherever**.
What does it mean **when**
Whippets are **whirling**?
All the **while** **whistling**
When they are **whizzing**?
What is the meaning?

DOT. My mother carried out a lifelong war against lazy speech. She also cared desperately about indefinite articles and subjunctive moods. There were people in town who actually believed that it was the intransitive verb that got her, that finally drove my mother crazy.

(MA begins laying out a Solitaire game in the rhythm of the conjugation.)

MA *(correcting)*.

Today I see. Yesterday I saw.
Many times I have seen.

DOT *(teasing)*.

>Today I seen.
Yesterday I seen.
Many times I have...saw.

Today I done.

MA. Today I do.

DOT. >Yesterday I done.

MA. Yesterday I did.

DOT. >Many times I have...did.

MA. Many times I have done.

DOT. My mother never cared much whether she was well liked, and she wasn't. In part because she believed that it was her job to tell all people great and small what she thought of them and what they should do to improve.

Before she completely lost her mind, she had weighed in on every decision any of us ever made. And that in-

cluded people in town as well as people in the family. It was common for her to say something like, “Oh, *we* don’t believe in that. *We* believe in this.” That was because she always spoke for more than just herself.

And now my mother’s on the decline, rapidly leaking her beans. But that does not prevent her from rendering an opinion or running the show.

She keeps a rigid schedule that does not vary day-to-day by as much as a minute. It’s her way of keeping the holes in her mind from showing.

(MA is playing Solitaire.)

MA. Dorothy, what time is it?

DOT. >It’s 10:23, Ma.

MA. What time does it say in the living room?

DOT. >10:23, Ma.

MA. No. Go look.

DOT. >It says 10:24, Ma.

MA. See, they’re different.

DOT. >Yeah, they are. But what does it matter?

MA. It matters because we have to get the mail at 10:30.

DOT. >We *have* to?

MA. Yes, we have to.

DOT. >Why do we have to?

MA. It’s what we always do.

DOT. >What if we don’t do it like that today?

MA. We don’t like to do it any other way.

DOT. >Who’s we?

MA *(looks up, impatient)*. Go change your shoes. You can’t wear those shoes downtown. *(Moves a card in her Solitaire game.)*

DOT. My mother plays Solitaire. A hundred games a day sometimes. She cheats like hell. But she doesn't play to win. She plays to prove she can still count backwards.

(MA places the cards in rhythm with the recitation of her schedule.)

MA. At 10:30 we get the mail and go for a little ride. At 11:30 we have a little lunch. At 12:30 we take a little nap. At 1:30 we go for a little ride. At 2:30 we have a little dinner. At 3:30 we have a little bath. At 4:30 we watch a little *Jeopardy* and a little *Wheel of Fortune* and then we go to bed.

DOT. >What if we don't do it like that today?

MA. Daddy likes it like that.

DOT. >This has nothing to do with Daddy.

MA. Of course it does. Daddy likes it like that.

DOT. >Daddy doesn't give a damn about the mail.

MA. Daddy does too, so do you.

DOT. >I don't give a damn about the mail.

MA. Oh yes you do.

DOT. >This schedule has nothing to do with Daddy, and nothing to do with me. It has to do with you!

MA *(moves a card then looks up)*. What are those things on your ears?

DOT. >Earrings, Ma.

MA. We don't like those things. Hussies wear those things. *(Counting her piles of cards.)* Four, three, two, one. See there, I've won again. *(Looking up with a sense of completion.)* What color is that blouse?

DOT. >Gray.

MA. We don't like gray. We don't look good in gray.

DOT. >What color do we look good in?

MA. Dusty rose.

DOT (*laughing*). >You know what, Ma? You would have made a wonderful mother for a couple of gay guys.

MA (*calling to an absent person*). Come on, Daddy, it's time to go to the post office.

DOT. >I'll take you to the post office.

MA. No, Daddy will take me.

DOT. >How about if I take you today?

MA. No, Daddy likes to take me.

DOT. >I know, Ma. But I'll do it today.

MA. But Daddy needs to go to the post office.

DOT. >I don't think so, Ma. He doesn't feel so good.

MA. He always feels like going to the post office.

DOT. >No, Ma. I'll take you today. Go get in the car.

MA. Your hair is in your eyes. You should cut your bangs.
(*Calling.*) Come on, Daddy. It's after 10:30.

DOT. >Daddy is resting.

MA. Daddy wants to go.

DOT. >Daddy is sick.

MA. Daddy likes to get out.

DOT. >Daddy needs to sleep.

MA. Oh pooh! Daddy sleeps too much. He needs to go for the mail.

DOT. >Mother, look at me. Daddy is sick. He is not going to take you to the post office. I am. Is that clear?

She looks at me, as if trying to decipher a sentence from an unknown language. Then she stamps her foot like an angry Shirley Temple. And sasses me.

MA. Nya-nya-nya-nya! You can't tell *me* what to do.

DOT. >That's it! (*Grabs MA by the elbow.*) I've had enough out of you today!

MA. YOU CAN'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO! (*DOT slaps MA on the butt.*) DADDY, SHE'S HITTING ME!

DOT. >AND I'LL HIT YOU AGAIN IF YOU DON'T MIND. (*MA ducks and scurries out of reach.*)

The two of us stand there eying each other, two wrestlers in a ring. I feel more powerful than I've ever felt before.

>Mother, you sit down at that table. I've had enough out of you today. Sit down. Right now. (*MA sits reluctantly.*) That's better. (*They eye each other warily. Silence.*)

Then she pokes me with her cane. AND I WANT TO KILL HER! (*DOT grabs the cane.*) It's at this point that I'm supposed to remember the difference between "cannot" and "will not." My mother cannot do any better. (*Long pause. DOT returns to the table.*) I pick up her deck of tattered cards. I'm trying to make amends.

>Here, Ma, play rummy with me. How many do I deal? (*As she deals.*) One?

MA. One.

DOT. >TWO?

MA. TWO.

DOT. >Three?

MA. Three.

DOT. >Four?

MA. Four.

DOT. >Five?

MA. Five.

DOT. >Six?

MA. Six.

DOT. >Seven.

MA. Seven.

DOT. >Seven. Is that right?

MA. Seven. Is that right?

(They play several seconds. MA picks up two cards from the discard pile.)

DOT. My mother can't remember how many cards to pick up from the discard pile. She doesn't seem to care. But I'm committed to the rules.

>You can pick up one or all. *(DOT takes them back.)*

MA. I want only two.

DOT. >I know. But you have to take one or all.

MA. Why?

DOT. >It's the rule. So go ahead. Draw. *(MA takes two cards.)* No. You can't take two. You have to take one or all.

MA. I want only two.

DOT. >You can't take just two. You have to take one or all.

MA. Why?

DOT. >It's the rule. So go ahead, draw. *(MA takes two cards.)* No. you can't take two. You have to take one card or all the cards in the pile.

MA. But I want only two.

DOT. >You can't take two. You have to take one or all.

MA. Why?

DOT. >Because!

MA. But I want only two.

DOT. >Okay, take two!

(MA picks up the cards and plays out her hand.)

MA. That's how I play it. I play it with two.

DOT. >Good work, Ma. You won.

MA. That's how I do it. I play it with two. *(Remembers her schedule.)* Come on, Daddy, let's go!

DOT *(grabs her hands and keeps her there)*. >No! You stay right where you are.

We stare at each other like two cats through a fence.

>Please don't start this again, Ma.

I let go of her. She doesn't fly, but something has changed. She may have forgotten how.

(Beat. The phone rings. Crossfade.)

Entr'Scene I

(DOT runs DL and picks up the receiver. SIS is DR. She is busy with something.)

SIS. How's your day?

DOT. Long.

SIS. That's because you're not thinking enough positive thoughts. (*DOT coughs loudly.*) Are you doing that on purpose?

DOT. I think it's caused by not thinking enough positive thoughts.

SIS. Everything is a joke with you.

DOT. Jump and laugh. Jump and laugh. Puff and Sally jump and laugh. (*Pause.*)

SIS. Are you finished?

DOT. Yes.

SIS. That negative energy is like a stop sign on the freeway of life. It affects everything you do, everyone you're with.

DOT. *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Norman Vincent Peale. 1956.

SIS. It's not the power of positive thinking. It's imaging with affirming energy.

DOT. What's the damn difference?

SIS. I will not have you making light of my beliefs. You could use a few yourself.

DOT. Right. A Girl Scout is always cheerful.

SIS. Yes!

DOT. Let's get something straight here. You are not allowed to tell me what to do.

SIS. I'm not telling you what to do.

DOT. You're not?

SIS. No.

DOT. Then what are you doing?

SIS. I'm helping you.

DOT (*eyes float up to the ceiling*). Well, if that's the case, thank you very much.

SIS. You're welcome. So...apart from your attitude, how are you?

DOT. Great! Gained five pounds since last Thursday. Ma's lost four.

SIS. That is terrible.

DOT. I know.

SIS. You've got to do something.

DOT. What should I do?

SIS. Stop eating.

DOT. What a good idea. I hadn't thought of that.

SIS. Listen, I was over at Clayton House this morning. It is really nice. *I* could live there. They have tablecloths, a little bud vase and a live flower on every table. They take them shopping every week. They take them on field trips.

DOT. And the people are all young and smart. With tons to look forward to.

SIS. They teach classes from junior college over there.

DOT. Our mother can't remember how many children she has.

SIS. She'll be around other people.

DOT. Except she hates other people.

SIS. I know, but there are all sorts of activities.

DOT. Every morning, after she moves into the old folks home, our mother will rush from her bed, fling open the window, and shout to the sky that she is happy to be alive.

SIS (*matter-of-factly*). Yes.

(Lights out on SIS and up on MA.)