

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

Postponing the Heat Death of the Universe

A One-Act Play

by

STEPHEN GREGG



DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

*** 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 fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. 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 anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 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. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

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

©MCMLXXXVI by
STEPHEN GREGG

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(POSTPONING THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE)

ISBN 0-87129-399-4

POSTPONING THE HEAT DEATH
OF THE UNIVERSE

A One-Act Play
For One Man and Two Women

CHARACTERS

NICK OLMSTED

JACKIE WALKER

STACY HOWARD

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A college dormitory.

PRODUCTION NOTE

There are two college dorm rooms, one belonging to Nick and one to Stacy. Nick's room is at C and contains a bed. Stacy's room is at L and contains a desk at which Stacy sits, motionless, until the lights come up on her during the phone call.

Postponing the Heat Death of the Universe

SCENE: The stage is dark. NICK is lying on his back on the bed. There is a knock on the door. No response. The knock is repeated. There is no answer and the door opens slowly. JACKIE comes in carrying an envelope, and turns on a lamp.

NICK (without moving). Who's there? (JACKIE is startled and immediately flicks off the light.)

JACKIE (whispering). I'm so sorry. It's Jackie Walker. I don't know -

NICK. I recognize the name.

JACKIE (whispering). Good. I just wanted to bring you a note . . . and I couldn't fit it under your door. Go back to sleep.

NICK. I wasn't sleeping.

JACKIE (whispering). Oh. The note says - NICK. You don't have to whisper. You didn't wake me.

JACKIE. Are you sure?

NICK. Positive.

JACKIE. May I turn on a light?

NICK. Fine.

JACKIE (turning on the lamp and setting the sealed envelope on the desk). The note just says I hope there are no hard feelings, and also congratulations, because making it to the finals as a freshman is really great.

NICK. Very nice of you.

JACKIE (annoyed). Yes. It was. (Pause.) I'll go now.

NICK. Okay. (JACKIE turns off the lamp. After a beat, she turns it back on.)

JACKIE. Do you realize that you haven't moved since I walked in here?

NICK. Yes

JACKIE. Don't you think that's sort of rude?

NICK. As rude as walking into a stranger's room uninvited?

JACKIE. We're not strangers. We were photographed together. (She reads an imaginary caption.) "Junior Jackie Walker and Freshman Nick Olmsted . . . finalists in this year's Emily J. Gore Philosophical Essay Contest." (NICK doesn't respond.) Tomorrow it'll say "Junior Jackie Walker - winner"

of this year's prestigious five thousand dollar Emily J. Gore Philosophical Essay Contest." (NICK doesn't respond.) And maybe on the back page there'll be a picture of you with the caption "Sullen Freshman Nick Olmsted mopes in bed after losing this year's prestigious Emily J. Gore - "

NICK. Would you go away please?

JACKIE. How gracious.

NICK. I'm not moping.

JACKIE. What are you doing?

NICK. Why does it concern you?

JACKIE. It doesn't. Never mind. (She turns off the lamp and walks to the door in the dark.)

NICK. Postponing entropy.

JACKIE (turning on a light switch next to the door). What?

NICK. You asked what I was doing. You seemed to think it was rude that I didn't tell you, and I didn't want you to think I was a bad sport.

JACKIE. I didn't hear what you said.

NICK (over-enunciating). Postponing entropy.

JACKIE. What?

NICK. Have you taken physics?

JACKIE. In high school.

NICK. Then you should know that every time you expend energy, you increase entropy.

JACKIE. What's entropy?

NICK (not quite sure himself). Confusion . . . disorder . . . It's . . . what you get when

you use up energy. The important thing is that entropy increases and energy decreases. (Pause.) You still don't understand.

JACKIE. No.

NICK. When you move, you use up energy. Eventually all of the energy everywhere will be used up. Everything will stop and be dark and cold. They call this the heat death of the universe.

JACKIE. They?

NICK. Scientists. By not expending any more energy than is necessary, I am granting everything a few extra moments of existence.

JACKIE. You're doing what?

NICK. I'm postponing the heat death of the universe.

JACKIE. That's very noble of you.

NICK. I do what I can.

JACKIE. Sort of a coincidence that you should decide to do this right after losing the scholarship.

NICK. Yup. Will you go now?

JACKIE. Look, I can understand your being disappointed -

NICK. I'm helping mankind.

JACKIE. But this seems a little silly.

NICK. You are entitled to your opinion. (The phone rings. No one moves. After five rings, JACKIE walks over to the phone and picks it up.)

JACKIE. Hello?

(The lights come up on STACY.)

STACY. Hello! Is Nick there?

JACKIE. Yes, he is. May I ask who's calling, please?

STACY. Tell him it's Stacy.

JACKIE. It's Stacy.

NICK (surprised). Stacy?

JACKIE (into the receiver). Stacy?

STACY. Stacy Howard.

JACKIE. Stacy Howard.

NICK. I know that. Let me have the phone.

JACKIE. What? You want me to bring it to you?

NICK. Yes. Lay it next to my ear here . . . please.

JACKIE. Forget it!

NICK. No, I'm not kidding. Let me talk to her.

JACKIE (swinging the phone by the cord). Be my guest.

NICK. I need the phone.

JACKIE. Then come get it.

STACY. I can call back later if you want.

JACKIE. She can call back later if that's better.

NICK. It's not better. Please bring me the phone.

JACKIE. If you really want to talk to her, you can come get it.

NICK. Give it to me now!

JACKIE. Do you want me to explain the situation to her?

NICK (angrily). I want you to give me the phone!

STACY. I take it this is a bad time.

JACKIE. She takes it this is a bad time.

NICK. It's not a bad time!

JACKIE. Then why don't you talk to your friend?

NICK. You know why!

JACKIE (into the receiver). Nick can't come to the phone right now. He's postponing entropy.

STACY. Oh. (She is confused.) All right. Maybe I'll call back later.

JACKIE. 'Bye.

STACY. 'Bye. (The lights go down on STACY as she hangs up the phone.)

JACKIE. She sounded confused. Was that your girlfriend?

NICK. I can't believe you did that.

JACKIE. I can't believe you wouldn't get up. Are you that unhappy?

NICK. I'm not unhappy.

JACKIE. Of course you are. I would be. But you know what? I've learned how to handle disappointment.

NICK. I am helping humanity. I am not disappointed.

JACKIE. Yes, you are. Can I tell you a story I think might help?

NICK. I am sacrificing myself for my species.

JACKIE (almost cutting NICK off). Can I tell you this story?

NICK. Will you leave my room?

JACKIE. Please?

NICK. If I let you tell the story, will you leave?

JACKIE. Yes.

NICK. Do it.

JACKIE. All right. (The following has to build so that the audience feels sympathy for JACKIE at the end of the speech.) Once upon a time, there was a girl we'll call Karen. Karen played left field on a high school softball team that was really good. This team didn't lose a game all season, and they won their district easily. But in the second game of the State Championship, with Karen's team up twenty-three to twelve in the bottom of the ninth, and two outs, the other team hit a pop-fly right to her. If she had caught that ball, her team would have won the game and probably the State Championship. But she didn't. She dropped it, and the girl on third scored. Twenty-three to thirteen. And then another girl scored. And then another one. And then another one. And when the score got to twenty-three to nineteen, Karen started to cry because she knew she might have blown the whole game. And sure enough. She cried through

the next thirty minutes while one player after another scored and they lost the game twenty-four to twenty-three. (Her voice trails off.) And after the game, none of the other girls would talk to her.

NICK (drawing the obvious conclusion). And that was you.

JACKIE (testily). Are you kidding? I played shortstop. I never missed. Little Miss Butterfingers had it right in her glove. I could've killed her. The whole season down the tubes.

NICK. What's the point? (There probably was a point but JACKIE has forgotten it and is carried away by her anger.)

JACKIE. I don't know. It makes me so angry just thinking about it. It was a really easy pop-fly. All she had to do was get under it and use both hands. But no. Instead, she reaches up all casual, like "watch me make the winning play."

NICK. But in the long run, it didn't matter.

JACKIE (still angry). Well, I wouldn't say that. None of the kids at school would talk to her. She never got a date to the prom. About a year later, her dad lost his job and they had to move away. It was never explicit, of course, but I always figured it had something to do with her dropping that softball.

NICK. I don't understand this story.

JACKIE. They're probably quite poor now.

NICK (exasperated). Why are you telling me this?

JACKIE. Do you have something better to do?

NICK. I am helping mankind.

JACKIE. You don't seriously believe that.

NICK. It is what I have chosen to do with my life and I wish you would let me do it in peace.

JACKIE. You're seriously not going to get up?

NICK. No.

JACKIE. Not even to eat?

NICK. That would require energy.

JACKIE. That's really stupid. What if I make you move? (She picks up one of NICK'S hands, shakes it back and forth vigorously, then lets it drop. It falls limp.)

NICK. You can't. I'm not going to move and you can't make me.

JACKIE. Well, if you're not going to move, how are you going to make me leave?

NICK. You said you'd leave.

JACKIE. That was when I thought you'd be reasonable.

NICK. This is my room.

JACKIE. And you're going to lie here for all eternity, right?

NICK. Correct.

JACKIE. So you won't need any of your stuff any more, right? (NICK does not respond. She walks to his desk.) Right? This stapler,

for example. I need a good stapler. Does it work? (She opens the top drawer of the desk, takes out pieces of paper, and begins stapling them.)

NICK. What are you doing? Put that back. (JACKIE continues to staple, one staple per piece of paper, and then pushes the pieces of paper to the side as she does so. Some of the papers fall to the floor. She keeps stapling as she talks.)

JACKIE. This is exactly what I need.

NICK. Put it away right now.

JACKIE. You're not going to be using it.

NICK. Put it away!

JACKIE. You're not going to be using anything in this room and I'd appreciate it if you'd be silent while I select what I need.

NICK. I'm not going to be silent. (JACKIE goes to the closet.)

JACKIE. Then I'll ignore you.

NICK. No you will not ignore me.

JACKIE (taking a shirt out of the closet and holding it up). Do you think this would fit me?

NICK. No. Put it down. (JACKIE sets the shirt on the floor and tries another.)

JACKIE. You're not helping anyone. You're being selfish and self-centered.

NICK. You're the selfish one. By making me talk, you are causing me to expend more energy than I otherwise would.

JACKIE. I'm not listening to you.