

ACCUSED OF COMEDY

By Carl L. Williams

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SYNOPSIS: After comedy has been outlawed in society, two bottom-of-the-barrel comics face trial for committing comedy, along with the young woman who broke the law by laughing at them. Confronted by a stern lady magistrate, they discover humor is no laughing matter.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 2 males)

HOOPER (m)..... vaudeville style comic, 30's
 DOBBS (m)ditto above, 40's
 WILHAMENA (f)sweetly attractive, naive, 20's
 MADAM MAGISTRATE (f)formidable, repressed, 30's-40's

SETTING: A detention center, sparsely furnished with simple benches and a single wooden chair.

TIME: Sometime in the ridiculous future.

PROPS: Two balloons.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Maxim Mazumdar One-Act Play Contest winner (2003) with production at Alleyway Theatre in Buffalo, NY as part of an evening of short works called, "Buffalo Quickies." The original cast is as follows:

Michael Starzynski HOOPER
 Louise Reger..... DOBBS
 Susan Drozd..... WILHAMENA
 Pamela Rose Mangus..... MADAME MADISTRATE
 Joyce Stilson..... DIRECTOR

A Playwrights Forum Festival winner with production in June, 2005 at Spokane Civic Theatre.

AT RISE: *WILHAMENA sits disconsolately as HOOPER and DOBBS stride back and forth.*

HOOPER: This is an outrage!

DOBBS: It's your own fault.

HOOPER: An absolute outrage!

DOBBS: You knew what would happen.

HOOPER: How dare they lock us up this way?!

DOBBS: And why me? I was only the straight man.

HOOPER: Aha! That's right. You're the one who set me up!

DOBBS: All I did was ask, "Why are they called gumdrops?" You're the one who had to say--

HOOPER: Because they make your teeth fall out, and then your gum drops.

WILHAMENA suddenly laughs, then claps her hands over her mouth and looks around fearfully.

DOBBS: It was bad enough they grabbed us for that lousy joke, but they even arrested this innocent bystander.

HOOPER: She was a by-laughner. Telling a joke is one violation. Responding with laughs, snickers, and titters is a separate offense. That's why they hauled her in.

WILHAMENA: I'm always getting picked up. I just can't help it. I laugh at everything.

DOBBS: Where were you when we needed you? At our last gig.

WILHAMENA: Don't tell me you're-- (*whispers*) Comedians.

HOOPER: That's a matter of opinion. Our last audience wasn't convinced.

WILHAMENA: Audience? But that's against the law. They shut down all the clubs.

HOOPER: We play the underground joints.

DOBBS: The laugh-easies.

HOOPER: Sound-proofed for belly laughs, but they still get raided by the humor police.

DOBBS: We're Hooper and Dobbs. Maybe you've heard of us.

WILHAMENA: No, but I think you're funny.

DOBBS: You could get us in trouble saying that.

HOOPER: She already got us in trouble when she laughed.

DOBBS: You got her in trouble when you made the joke.

HOOPER: I only made half the joke. And the last time I got a girl in trouble, it was no joke!

HOOPER makes a vaudevillian punch line gesture, and WILHAMENA laughs.

DOBBS: Wow. You really do laugh at everything.

WILHAMENA: I think I was born that way. I tried applying for disability, but they told me I just have to control myself.

HOOPER: As long as you're with us, feel free to lose control.

DOBBS: We should at least know our audience's name, don't you think?

WILHAMENA: Wilhamena.

HOOPER: Wilhamena. That's a pretty name.

WILHAMENA: I don't like it. The kids used to call me Wilhamena the laughing hyena.

DOBBS: They were joking.

WILHAMENA: No, that would've gotten them suspended. I try hard to stay out of trouble. I keep to myself. In the evening I listen to the government symphony on TV. There's nothing funny about the symphony. Except the triangle player.

HOOPER: You got a sense of humor.

WILHAMENA: Don't say that. It's cruel.

DOBBS: Never be ashamed to laugh.

WILHAMENA: I'm just afraid. What do you think they're going to do to us?

HOOPER: Make us pay a fine, I suppose.

WILHAMENA: Or lock us up. It depends on the offense.

DOBBS: We've been offensive a long time.

WILHAMENA: It's hard to find work when you have a record. Even when they give you a chance, they're always watching you, waiting for you to slip up with a smile or a funny remark.

HOOPER: We know a lot about people waiting for us to be funny.

DOBBS: It's a hallmark of our career. Oh, Mr. Hooper.

HOOPER: Yes, Mr. Dobbs?

DOBBS: Say something funny for our audience here.

HOOPER: All right. Transylvania. Schenectady. Dubuque.

DOBBS: Dubuque? Why not Omaha?

HOOPER: Omaha's not funny.

DOBBS: Omaha has to be funny. It ends with a "ha."

HOOPER and DOBBS: *(With a "ta-da" gesture to WILHAMENA.)*

HA!

WILHAMENA doubles over laughing.

HOOPER: We're a hit!

DOBBS: This kid's a one-woman laugh track.

WILHAMENA: It's just that. . . in a world where there's no humor allowed, any little thing at all seems really funny.

HOOPER: The audience giveth, and the audience taketh away.

DOBBS: You want funny? I got funny.

DOBBS takes a balloon from his pocket and starts to blow it up.

HOOPER: If we had a deck of cards, we could play strip poker. I always get laughs when I'm naked.

DOBBS: I only play strip solitaire.

WILHAMENA: What are you going to do with the balloon?

DOBBS: Here's an opera singer hitting high C.

DOBBS stretches apart the neck of the inflated balloon to make a high-pitched squeal as he opens his mouth in sync to it, performing with emotional expressions and playing the balloon to vary its sounds as he "vocalizes," ending with a drawn-out note.

HOOPER: That wasn't a high C. Didn't you ever take music lessons?

DOBBS: Yeah, but I didn't take notes.

WILHAMENA is laughing.

DOBBS: *(Continued, still playing the balloon, breaks into song)*

"Lady of Spain, I adore you!"

MADAM MAGISTRATE, dressed in severe, militaristic garb, marches in sternly with a file folder.

MADAM: Stop that! Stop that right this minute! You are breaking the law!

DOBBS holds the balloon, but lets the air whoosh out in a noisy rush. WILHAMENA cowers.

HOOPER: Who are you?

MADAM: I am Madam Magistrate. Don't you know the use of balloons has been outlawed?

DOBBS: What, this? It's a lung exerciser.

MADAM: Give it here. Right now.

MAGISTRATE stretches out her hand, and DOBBS gives her the balloon, which SHE takes with disgust and puts in her pocket.

HOOPER: Saving it till later, huh?

MADAM: Are you two Dobbs and Hooper?

HOOPER: No, we're Hooper and Dobbs.

DOBBS: Why can't we ever be Dobbs and Hooper?

HOOPER: That wouldn't be kosher.

DOBBS: But we're not Jewish.

HOOPER: Of course not, or we'd be a lot funnier.

MADAM: Enough! You are shamelessly violating the law, and in the very presence of a magistrate.

DOBBS: I never met a magistrate before. Is that anything like a potentate?

MADAM: I am invested with the full authority of the law to make a disposition of your case.

HOOPER: Our case is disposed? Let's go.

HOOPER and DOBBS turn to go.

MADAM: Stop!

DOBBS: I guess we're indisposed.

WILHAMENA is barely restraining a laugh.

MADAM: And you, young woman. Are you about to do something contrary to the law?

WILHAMENA shakes her head.

HOOPER: Wait a minute, lady--

MADAM: Call me Madam.

DOBBS: An Irving Berlin fan.

MADAM: I don't get it.

DOBBS: (*Groucho inflection.*) And dressed like that, you never will.

MADAM: You're not making sense.

DOBBS: I'm not making whoopee, either, so get that out of your mind.

HOOPER: Which reminds me. . . what did you do with my whoopee cushion?

MADAM: All such contraband is incinerated.

HOOPER: That really burns me up.

WILHAMENA snickers.

MADAM: Control yourself!

WILHAMENA: That's what everybody tells me. But how?

MADAM: When you're faced with temptation— (*Glances at HOOPER and DOBBS.*)—it helps to think unpleasant thoughts.

DOBBS: That's not hard with you around.

MADAM: Concentrate on the gravity of life. The striving. The yearning. The heartaches. Watch the news more often.

WILHAMENA: I'll try.

HOOPER: The biggest news is the ongoing persecution of those of us in the humor profession.

MADAM: Prosecution is not persecution. It is justice.

DOBBS: They really did a good job indoctrinating you.

MADAM: I have been emancipated from the slavery of silliness. I do not waste my energy in meaningless and improper activities.

HOOPER: Gee, I always liked meaningless and improper activities.

MADAM: Thankfully, society has made great progress in recent years by subjugating--in some cases, eliminating--those of your so-called profession, until now we're down to the likes of you.

DOBBS: Everybody's a critic.

MADAM: We arrested the most blatant offenders first, of course--the ones most responsible for causing laughter. David Letterman is doing 9,000 hours of community service. Jay Leno is on shock probation in Burbank.

HOOPER: And I heard you picked up Conan O'Brien.

MADAM: Yes, but we had to let him go for lack of evidence.

DOBBS: No matter how repressive you get, you'll never stop the laughter.

MADAM: Oh, really? Woody Allen is serving a life sentence. And we shot Jim Carrey.

WILHAMENA: You didn't!

MADAM: All films and television shows evoking laughs are now banned.

HOOPER: At least the networks got to keep their sitcoms.

MADAM: Every day we arrest people for dealing in the black market. Our undercover agents seek out contraband tapes of "I Love Lucy" and "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." And when the buy is made--bam! Off to jail the culprits go.

DOBBS: I suppose that gives you satisfaction.

MADAM: Not enough. I'd love to get my hands on those rogues of the past... Bob Hope, Red Skelton, Groucho Marx, Mae West.

HOOPER: I feel the same way.

DOBBS: You do?

HOOPER: I'd love to get my hands on Mae West.

WILHAMENA laughs.

MADAM: (To *WILHAMENA*.) If you don't stop that, I'll have you sedated.

WILHAMENA: Please don't.

MADAM: I'd send you off to jail if I thought it would do any good. But you need treatment, so I'm going to commit you to a reeducation center.

WILHAMENA: No!

MADAM: The doctors there have discovered which parts of the brain coordinate the laugh response. You will undergo a minor surgical procedure to short-circuit the neurological connection.

HOOPER: Do what you want to me, but leave the girl alone.

DOBBS: Yeah, do what you want to Hooper, but leave us alone.

MADAM: I will do what I want with all of you. And now I intend to proceed with this adjudication. *(Sits in the wooden armchair.)* Hooper and Dobbs, you stand accused of comedy.

HOOPER: That's because we're stand-up comics.

MADAM: Is that a confession?

HOOPER: No, it's a joke.

MADAM: In which case, that's a confession.

DOBBS: What we have here is a clear case of entrapment.

MADAM: Are you a lawyer?

DOBBS: You don't have to get insulting.

MADAM: I warn you, lawyer jokes carry an extra fine.

HOOPER: Who made that law?

MADAM: The lawyers. Do you have any defense for the conduct of which you are accused?

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