

A Play, "The Case of Matthew Mattix"

By ALICE K. SMITH
Tallahassee, Florida

CAST OF CHARACTERS

IDA WANNA WORK }
HAYTA WORK } School Girls
WIDA WAKE }
AUNT NĒVA WORK, a lady of leisure.
ECKS, a mysterious character.
BELLA DUMM, a rather bright girl.
NEWSBOY, heard but not seen.
MR. G. OTTO WORK, a burdened parent.
I. WOOD WORK, never idle.
HUNTER WORK, not so industrious.
ARCHIE TECK, always planning houses.
ABEL BILDER, a contractor.
MĪNDA RANGE, an X-cellent cook.
MISS NITA NEEDLES, who sews a fine seam.
MISS STATTIE STITIAN, a sociologist.
N. A. BURR, who lives nearby.
AL GEBRA, very fond of Ecks.
Non-speaking parts:
MATTHEW MATTIX, the arch-criminal.
G. O. MERTRY, accomplice of Matthew Mattix and Al Gebra.
A surveyor, a manufacturer, a bridge builder, a navigator, and an astronomer.

SCENES

SCENE I. Living-room of the Work home. It is late in the afternoon of a spring day of the early 1930's.

SCENE II. The same. Two weeks later.

SCENCE I

IDA WANNA (*Throwing down pencil in disgust*). I can't do this problem. Listen to this. (*Reads*) "A dog on the Manakin Road barks 40 minutes every time anyone passes by. How many passers-by will it take to keep him barking all night, allowing $10\frac{2}{3}$ hours?"

HAYTA. That's nothing, absolutely nothing. Can you feature this? (*Reads*) "A mouse is at the top of a poplar tree 60 feet high, and a cat is on the ground at the foot of the tree. The mouse descends $\frac{1}{2}$ of a foot each day and at night it turns back $\frac{1}{8}$ of a foot. The cat climbs 1 foot a day and goes back $\frac{1}{4}$ of a foot each night. The tree grows between the cat and the mouse $\frac{1}{4}$ of a foot each day, and it shrinks $\frac{1}{8}$ of a foot every night. In how many days will the cat reach the mouse, and how many feet has the tree grown in the meantime, and how far does the cat climb?"

(A slight pause during which the girls look at each other in disgust. Aunt Neva yawns)

WIDA WAKE *(Entering R. hurriedly, much excited)*. Oh-Oh-Oh-I'm so scared! I was almost home when I saw that terrible Matthew Mattix coming toward me, with some of his friends.

HAYTA WORK. Not Al Gebra?

WIDA. Yes, Al Gebra and that frightfully plain G. O. Mettry!

HAYTA. What a narrow escape! *(Noise is heard outside. HAYATA goes to window.)* Oh, look out of the window!

WIDA *(Going to window)*. Omigoodness! There's the police wagon! Oh, they're arresting Matthew and Al and G. O! They've got them in the wagon!

HAYTA AND BELLA. Goody! Oh, boy! *(Go to table, close books, throw them down, pick up comic papers and start to read, giggling)*

(A knock is heard at left.)

AUNT. Who is that little boy in the back yard? *(Goes R. back of curtain.)* Come in, little boy.

(Enter Ecks, L., half sobbing)

Who are you?

ECKS. I'm Ecks.

WIDA. Oh yes, the great unknown! He looks rather tiny to me, though.

AUNT. Are you lost?

ECKS. Yes'm, I am, and I know my father is looking for me.

AUNT. Who is your father?

ECKS. Al Gebra.

AUNT. Oh yes, I've heard that he's always losing Ecks and getting everybody to help him find him.

BELLA DUMM. I've tried to find Ecks lots of times, but I never could. Sometimes I'd think I had him, but he always turned out to be a minus quantity.

IDA WANNA. I'm positive I could have found him, but it was always too much trouble. And now that we have found him, will some one please tell me what we are going to do with him?

ECKS. Take me to my father!

HAYTA. We can't do that. He's been arrested and taken to jail. He's such a low cuss that I should think you 'd never want to see him again.

ECKS. Oh-h-h-h! (*Aunt puts arm about his shoulders.*)

AUNT. Hayta, I'm really ashamed of you.

(*Curtain*)

SCENE II

(*Girls and Aunt seated. Loud crash heard. Girls jump up.*)

WIDA. What was that?

BELLA. Some one must have dropped a perpendicular.

NEWSBOY. (*Outside*) Wuxtra! Wuxtra! Wuxtra!

(*Continues calling until Hayta comes out. His voice is heard after that, more and more faintly as he apparently goes down the street and out of hearing.*)

HAYTA. Oh, there's a newsboy with an extra!

AUNT. Take this nickel and buy one. (*Hayta takes nickel and goes out. She is heard asking the boy for a paper, and returns immediately.*)

HAYTA. Oh! (*Reads*) Matthew Mattix, Al Gebra, and G. O. Mettry have been sentenced to death! (*Aunt takes paper.*)

AUNT. I wonder what the charges were. (*Hayta hands paper to Aunt.*) (*Reads*) For cruelty to dumb animals, arson, grand larceny, mayhem, and homicide!

WIDA WAKE. Auntie! Not really!

AUNT. It's true, though. They cruelly tore Don Roucks and Ronald Sloyd off the football team, caused Hester Cholley to burn up the midnight electricity, stole so much time from play that Jack became a dull boy, cut George Apthorpe down 30 pounds, made a number of pupils study their arms off, and killed thousands by overwork!

ALL. Oh-Oh-Oh-Oh! How horrible!

HAYTA. But at last they'll be put out of the way.

IDA WANNA. Glorious! Now I can spend all my study periods reading *College Humor* and *Ballyhoo!*

BELLA. Me, too. But I'm sorry for them. Their sorrow must be acute.

IDA WANNA. Don't be obtuse!

BELLA. Think how you and I would feel.

IDA WANNA. That's not a parallel case. Any way, we'll never meet them again, however far the sentence is extended.

HAYTA. I certainly hope they'll keep at an infinite distance from me!

(Enter father, Mr. G. Otto Work. Sits in chair, and groans. Girls gather around him.)

HAYTA. Father, what *has* happened?

(Mr. Work groans.)

AUNT. Are you hungry, Brother? Here, eat this pie I saved for you.

(Hands him piece of pie, made from card-board, on which the letter π is plainly visible.)

MR. WORK. No, Sister, the root of my trouble lies deeper than that.

IDA WANNA. Well, can't you have it extracted?

MR. WORK. (Shakes head and groans.) Children, there is a radical change in our affairs. I have lost my job in the controller's office.

ALL. How? Why?

MR. WORK. You see, they are putting Matthew Mattix out of existence, and we can do nothing. Everyone in the controller's office, the treasurer and his force, the road department, in fact, every one except the janitor is out of work. And since even a broom handle cannot be made without the aid of Matthew Mattix, he'll soon be wandering the streets, too.

(I. WOOD WORK enters, carrying carpenter's tools)

I. WOOD WORK. (Breathlessly) Have you heard what has happened?

WIDA } What now?

HAYTA } Anything more?

I. WOOD. Everything! Our saws wouldn't cut straight, our squares turned to rhombuses, and when we tried to lay some brick, everyone of them turned into oblique parallepipeds! Telephones are out of order, the water works have broken down, and not an automobile will run because all the cylinders are missing. They can't weigh things in the grocery stores, can't make change, and the dry goods stores have closed because they cannot measure. Everything is in the wildest confusion! The telegraph has ceased communication, and we are cut off from the rest of the world. Just now an aeroplane fell to the ground, probably because the aviator could not find his altitude and angle of elevation!

BELLA. But how did it all happen?

MR. WORK. Don't you understand? Science depends upon Matt-

new Mattix for it's very existence. Naturally, without Matthew Mattix the works of Science must cease.

(HUNTER WOOD *Enters, carrying gun*)

BELLA. Hello, did you get anything?

HUNTER. No. Couldn't hit a thing. Every shot, instead of going in a decent parabola, went zigzagging about at random, and I had to stop for fear one would fly off at a tangent and kill a cow.

BELLA. Gosh. I didn't know there was any need of Matthew Mattix in the course of a bullet.

MR. WORK. Don't show your ignorance, Bella. Have you never heard of Triggernometry?

(*Architect, surveyor, builder, manufacturer, bridge-builder, navigator, astronomer, and others ad. lib. pass across stage, gloomy and dejected. They pile up their instruments in the corner.*)

ARCHITECT. These things can all go into the trash can now. We've no further use for them. Eventually we'll all go back to living in tepees.

BUILDERS. Nothing so good as tepees! Do you think for a minute that we could erect a vertical pole without the aid of Matthew Mattix?

ARCHITECT. Right, Mr. Builder. (*Puts his head in his hands.*)

MR. WORK. There's nothing left for us to do but to sit down and wait for the end. Even then we won't be able to erect a perpendicular to ascend to Heaven on.

IDA WANNA. Let's turn on the radio.

MR. BILDER. Don't you know that the radio depends upon the most intricate calculations of Matthew Mattix? He even has to call in his friends, Cal and Anna, to help.

HAYTA. Cal who? Anna who?

MR. BILDER. Cal Culus, of course, and Anna Lytics.

(*Enter COOK L.*)

COOK. Please, Miss, It's just terrible. Nothing I've cooked has come out right. The bread won't rise, the jelly won't jell, and the cakes have fallen!

MR. WORK. Matthew Mattix needed again! You simply couldn't get the right ratio.

COOK. Yassir! (*Exit COOK L.*)

(*Enter MISS NITA NEEDLES R.*)

MISS NEEDLES. Madame, I can't do anything with this dress!

The sleeves, waist, and skirt are all out of proportion! (*Everyone shakes his head and looks gloomily at everyone else*) And the corresponding parts simply can't be made to coincide! Look at this! (*Holds up dress with sleeves ridiculously narrow and long, waist wide and short, skirt very tiny, much shorter and narrower than waist.*)

AUNT. Well, I certainly cannot wear that. (*NITA takes dress. Exit Nita.*)

(*Enter STATTIE STISHAN*)

STATTIE. Hello, folks. My job is gone, like all the rest. All the statistics owed their existence to Matthew Mattix. We can't do much without them, so I'm not needed any more.

(*Loud noise heard outside.*)

(*Neighbor rushes in.*)

N. A. BURR. Hooray! Hooray!

ALL. What is it?

N. A. BURR. The electricians refused to electrocute their friends Matthew Mattix, Al Gebra, and G. O. Mettry. The governor has stayed the execution, and Matthew Mattix and his pals are set free! I brought them along with me.

(*Enter MATTHEW, MATTIX, etc.*)

MR. WORK. Friends, we welcome you here!

WIDA. I see where I've been making a sad mistake. It has been demonstrated to me beyond the shadow of a doubt that Matthew Mattix and Al Gebra are about the most useful people I know, and G. O. Mettry will always look beautiful to me, and no longer plain.

N. A. BURR. You are quite right. Without them Science would be helpless. Construction would cease, and we would lose most of our luxuries and comforts. There would not even be any railroads or steam ships.

MR. WORK. We have been saved from a great calamity.

AL GEBRA. (*Weeping*) But all this means nothing to me. There will be no joy for me until Ecks is found.

(*ECKS rushes in and throws himself into the arms of AL GEBRA*)

ECKS. Daddy!

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of Mathematics!*