



**THE  
APARTMENT  
COMPLEX**

**SEVEN ONE-ACT PLAYS BY  
WILLIAM INGE**

**EDITED BY  
CRAIG POSPISIL**



**DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.**



THE APARTMENT COMPLEX — SEVEN ONE-ACT PLAYS  
(MARGARET’S BED, THE KILLING, THE POWER OF SILENCE,  
PRODIGAL, THE CALL, THE LOVE DEATH, MOVED-IN)  
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Introduction  
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## INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago, I was in the middle of editing a new volume for DPS's *Outstanding Short Plays* series. I had eight or nine plays for that anthology already chosen, but needed to find one or two more to complete it. I reached out to several agents to ask if any of their clients had short plays they might like to submit. It was then that the agent for the William Inge estate sent me a short play by the late author called *The Love Death* and mentioned that he had more.

After reading the play, I was struck by the tragic story of a writer who decides to commit suicide and sets about calling several of the people in his life to say goodbye. Even without knowing any details of Inge's life and death, I immediately sensed an absolute honesty in the writing. The piece didn't fit with the tone of the other plays I'd collected for *Outstanding Short Plays, Vol. 2*, but that was all right, because I was more than interested in the agent's comment that he had more unpublished short plays by Inge. "Can you send me all of them?" I asked. And soon eight more arrived.

Nine unpublished, largely unknown short plays by one of the pillars of 20th century American theater was definitely something exciting to discover, and to consider adding to the many plays of William Inge that Dramatists already publishes made it more so. And I became more excited as I read the plays. These are raw works, and I mean that both in terms of the tone of the writing, and in terms of the roughness of the plays. Many of these weren't even performed during Inge's lifetime and a couple of the manuscripts had handwritten revisions in the margins. But what they may lack in polish, they make up for in terms of the naked emotions Inge brings to the page.

To be completely honest, I wasn't overly familiar with William Inge's plays. I'd seen the movie version of *Bus Stop* many years ago, and I saw the recent Broadway revival of *Picnic*, but I only had a passing familiarity with much of his work. What I was sure of was how much the writing in these short plays differed from his earlier and most famous plays. Where those works deal with the repressed emotions that were the law of the land in Midwestern America in the earlier part of the 1900s, these short works from the 1960s were clearly influenced by that decade's far more open attitudes. These were characters that often held little back.

To move forward with editing an anthology of his works, I felt I needed to learn a lot more about Inge and his work. I dipped into the library here at Dramatists Play Service, read through his plays, got a copy of Ralph F. Voss' biography entitled *A Life of William Inge, The Strains of Triumph*, and gained a much greater appreciation for the man and his writing.

Any wildly successful artist has a period of time when their work is not just well-received or popular, but when they seem to tap into something in the zeitgeist so their work transcends the “merely” good and becomes something more. In the 1950s Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and William Inge had each clearly accomplished that in their own ways. Inge's successes in this time were enormous. He'd only really started writing plays in the late 1940s, but four of his first five full length plays were major Broadway hits. In 1950, *Come Back, Little Sheba* was the first of his plays to be produced in New York, and it was only the second play he'd written. *Sheba* was followed on Broadway in 1953 by the even more successful *Picnic*, which also won Inge the Pulitzer Prize. Two years later, Inge was back on Broadway with *Bus Stop*, and two years after that came *Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, which was actually a revised version of his first play, *Farther from Heaven*. So, really the first four plays he wrote all became hit Broadway plays. On top of that, all four were turned into very successful films. Two of his other plays were adapted into films, another was adapted for television, and his original screenplay *Splendor in the Grass* won him an Academy Award for Best Screenplay in 1962. That's an amazing run.

But Inge was unable to enjoy his success at the time. He was a gay man in a time where it was virtually impossible to be himself openly. He struggled with depression and alcoholism, spending years in psychoanalysis and at A.A. He clashed with a number of his directors, and a poor review would send him into a tailspin. If Inge couldn't truly be happy when his plays were popular, he was even less able to find peace when the times changed and his run of hits ended. As I said, in reading his play *The Love Death*, I sensed a real truth in the words and the emotions. After learning that he'd killed himself, it's clear that *The Love Death* — and indeed several of the short plays he wrote in the mid- and late 1960s — amount to Inge's suicide note.

Arthur Miller's giant themes and Tennessee Williams' delicate and lyrical dialogue have perhaps kept their work to be seen as more vital to our contemporary eyes and ears. Inge's characters live in a world of repressed emotions, especially surrounding sex. If heterosexual intercourse, even between married couples, was something that verged on shameful, sex outside of marriage or homosexual relations were a social death sentence. Inge's characters feel things just as deeply, and their lives are just as destroyed as the characters in Miller's or Williams' plays, but part of their tragedy is the inability to show it. The social revolutions of the 1960s and the decades since have done a lot to wipe away many of the emotional barriers and stigmas that went along with them. Inge's plays, therefore, can feel "old-fashioned" or quaint to contemporary audiences. But I think that's a disservice to them and to Inge. And it's a way of viewing his plays that I was guilty of too, until I started to research Inge's life and to try to read his plays with new eyes. These are rich works, and Inge was rarely less than brutally honest in how he wrote about the world as he saw it.

As I considered the nine unpublished works, an immediate division between most was apparent. Several bore the title *Complex*, followed by individual titles (like *The Love Death*) just below, and Voss' biography confirmed that Inge was working on a play with that master title comprised of short plays set in a dark, impersonal apartment complex in large city. Many of the other unpublished works were set in small towns, more reminiscent of the settings of *Picnic* or *Dark at the Top of the Stairs*.

In thinking about how to present these new plays, I looked at an earlier collection of short plays that Dramatists published by Inge, simply called *Eleven Short Plays*, which featured plays he had written in the 1950s. Inge frequently used one-acts and short plays as a testing ground for characters and stories that he would later adapt into full-length works. In doing this, I remembered that Dramatists had four one-acts of Inge's which had previously been published, but were now out of print. If those four were added to the nine unpublished plays, then we would easily have enough plays for two volumes. And with roughly half of all the plays set in apartments in a city, and the others mostly in more rural settings, I had a natural division for the collections as well.

As a playwright myself, I dislike collections that are simply called “*Five One-Acts*” or “*Eleven Short Plays*.” It seems too generic, and too easy to confuse with another collection, or just overlook. I prefer an overall title that somehow relates to the plays in the anthology, and then maybe “Three One-Acts” or whatever as a descriptive subtitle.

The first seven plays I collected under the title of *The Apartment Complex — Seven One-Act Plays*, which I hope serves as an acknowledgment of Inge’s unfinished collection, as well as a grouping of plays which I feel have a strong connection in setting and theme, and which could make a cohesive evening in the theater.

The second collection didn’t have quite so obvious an overall title. Several of the other plays were set in small towns, very much like Independence, Kansas, where Inge had grown up, but of the others one was set in a prison and another took place in something like a fantasy version of America. I played with a couple of options before settling on *Somewhere in America — Six One-Act Plays*, which feels apropos for a quintessentially Midwestern American playwright, who lived in Independence, St. Louis, New York, and Los Angeles, but who couldn’t seem to find a permanent home anywhere.

I hope many of you will read these plays with a new appreciation of William Inge, as I did, and more I hope that you will be moved to produce these plays and give them a home.

—*Craig Pospisil*  
*February 2016*  
*New York, NY*

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# MARGARET'S BED



## **CHARACTERS**

ELSIE

BEN

## **SETTING**

A large apartment complex in the northern part of Manhattan's Upper West Side.

## **TIME**

The mid- to late 1960s.

# MARGARET'S BED

*A small, compact apartment in a housing complex on New York's Upper West Side. It is inhabited by two young women, and so is feminine in its décor. But the décor is not frilly or pretentious. Rather, it looks as if it might be the domicile of two female students, which it is.*

*The time is midnight. The apartment is empty and dimly lit by one small lamp left burning on a table.*

*After several seconds, two young people, a man and a woman, enter from the corridor. The woman is in her early twenties. The man is close to thirty. They are an attractive couple, well-dressed, looking as if they had just come from a concert, and they have. They are talking about it as they enter.*

ELSIE. I still just can't get used to Schönberg.

BEN. He's one of my favorites.

ELSIE. Honestly?

BEN. Why should I lie?

ELSIE. Oh ... I just think that some people like to claim they have modern tastes when actually they don't know what they're listening to. The same is true with movies. Did you like *Blow-Up*?

BEN. Loved it.

ELSIE. Did you *really*?

BEN. Of course. I think it's one of the greatest movies I ever saw. *(Elsie turns on more lights. We can see into the bedroom now and observe that there are twin beds.)*

ELSIE. Then maybe I'm just stupid.

BEN. I wouldn't let it give me an inferiority complex.

ELSIE. Well, it does. Margaret ... that's the girl I share this apartment with ... she's always bragging about what a wonderful movie *Blow-Up*

was ... *is* ... and she's always claiming it's one of the greatest movies ever created ...

BEN. Well, it's one of the best movies *I* ever saw.

ELSIE. You, too! Then what's wrong with *me*? I left the movie absolutely infuriated because it never told me who killed that poor man in the park.

BEN. But, you see ... that's the point in a way. I mean ... Well, life is full of mysteries, isn't it?

ELSIE. ... Yes.

BEN. Mysteries that we never find the answer to. I think that's what the picture was about: The mystery of life and all the evil deeds that are done and never accounted for.

ELSIE. Well ... that makes sense. Margaret never says *why* she thinks it's so wonderful. She just blabs on and on about it so everyone will think she's very *avant-garde*.

BEN. Is she a student at Columbia, too?

ELSIE. Yes. Only she's working on her Ph.D., and I'm just working on my Master's. You see, her family lives over in Trenton. So she goes home every Saturday morning, and ...

BEN. You're working on a Master's?

ELSIE. In Library Science. Doesn't that sound dull?

BEN. You *make* it sound dull. Is it?

ELSIE. Oh, maybe not. Maybe I'm just not interested in my work. Do you want a drink?

BEN. I don't think so. You go ahead.

ELSIE. Oh, I really don't want one, either. (*She laughs.*) But that's how I got you to come home with me, isn't it?

BEN. How do you mean?

ELSIE. I mean, I suggested very politely that we both come to my place for a drink. And now, neither of us wants a drink.

BEN. I guess we both know why we came here, don't we? (*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. She doesn't respond. He is baffled.*) Don't we?

ELSIE. Oh, yes, of course.

BEN. Then give a little. Here, let's try again. (*He kisses her again but still she fails to respond.*) Hey! What's the matter with you?

ELSIE. What are you talking about?

BEN. You're kissing me like a clam.

ELSIE. Here. I'll try to do better. (*She offers herself again to be kissed.*)

BEN. Forget it.

ELSIE. Oh, I'm sorry.

BEN. Tell me. Why *did* you want me to come here?

ELSIE. Because I liked you.

BEN. Really?

ELSIE. Of course.

BEN. Then why can't you kiss me like you enjoyed it?

ELSIE. I don't know. I *tried*.

BEN. But you acted like you couldn't wait to get me here. *Why?*

ELSIE. Well ... I'm terribly afraid to be out by myself late at night.

BEN. I see. You wanted my protection.

ELSIE. Oh, please don't feel insulted. After all, I did flirt with you at intermission, didn't I? I wouldn't have tried to pick you up if I hadn't thought you were very attractive. I mean ... I'd even have gone home alone rather than let *some* men escort me.

BEN. Now that I'm here?

ELSIE. Well ... we were having a very stimulating conversation, weren't we?

BEN. Yes, but I didn't bring you home for conversation.

ELSIE. No ... I don't suppose you did.

BEN. Do you want me to go now? Do you want to get rid of me?

ELSIE. (*Anxiously.*) Oh, no! Please don't go.

BEN. (*Stifles a yawn.*) Well, to tell the truth, I don't think I'm up to much more of this stimulating conversation.

ELSIE. You came here expecting to do the sex thing, didn't you?

BEN. I don't mean to offend you, but you gave me the very firm impression of expecting the same.

ELSIE. Yes, I guess I did.

BEN. And you don't feel like ... carrying through. Is that it?

ELSIE. Well, not really.

BEN. Then I can only say I'm glad to have been of help, escorting you home, protecting you from possible attackers, and say good night and ...

ELSIE. (*Very anxious.*) Oh, please don't go!

BEN. I don't understand.

ELSIE. Please stay.

BEN. But whatever for?

ELSIE. Oh, we could have a wonderful talk. We could tell each other all about each other, and discuss music and ... science, and ...

BEN. I don't think I'm up to it.

ELSIE. But we could really get acquainted. We don't even know each other's name, and I don't even know what you do.

BEN. My name is Ben Masters. I'm interning at Presbyterian.  
ELSIE. Oh, that's fascinating, Ben. I love the name *Ben*. It's so ... so *trustworthy*. My name is Elsie Hogan. I come from Iowa. You already know my status as a graduate student.  
BEN. I'm from Texas originally. But it's been quite a few years since I've been back.  
ELSIE. Whereabouts in Texas?  
BEN. Lubbock.  
ELSIE. Lubbock! That sounds like a name you'd call someone to insult him. Like *Hey, you Lubbock you!*  
BEN. (*Bored.*) Funny!  
ELSIE. Oh, I didn't mean to insult you.  
BEN. You didn't.  
ELSIE. Won't you sit down and ...  
BEN. (*Irate.*) No. I won't sit down. It's time I was getting back to my room.  
ELSIE. (*Sounding very much in need.*) Oh, please don't go! I beg you, don't go off and leave me.  
BEN. I'm beginning to think you're about the biggest kook I ever met, and believe me, I've met some oddballs in my life. But never did I meet an attractive girl who expected a guy she has picked up ... Yes! You picked me up. You can't deny it ... to sit down and spend the night with her, *talking*.  
ELSIE. I suppose.  
BEN. Do you expect the two of us to sit here together all night and just *talk*?  
ELSIE. It could be fun.  
BEN. You're a weirdo.  
ELSIE. Am I?  
BEN. You are in *my* book.  
ELSIE. Sorry. I feel now I've brought you here under a false impression.  
BEN. You have.  
ELSIE. Please forgive me.  
BEN. I forgive you. But you've got to pardon me if I leave now.  
ELSIE. Oh ... don't! Please don't leave me here all alone.  
BEN. Look! I have to get home and get some rest.  
ELSIE. Tomorrow's Sunday. Do you work on Sunday?  
BEN. Yes.  
ELSIE. Oh!

BEN. So I'll say *good night* now, and ...

ELSIE. Look! Why don't you stay here and sleep in Margaret's bed?  
(*Ben stands looking at Elsie for several moments.*)

BEN. Are you serious?

ELSIE. Yes. It's a very good bed. I'd promise to get you up in the morning and fix you a lovely breakfast and send you off to work.

BEN. But what is the point in my staying here and sleeping in Margaret's bed?

ELSIE. Well, you see, I ...

BEN. And besides, I get up at five in the morning to start making my rounds at six.

ELSIE. Oh, I'd get up at five. (*Again he stares at her inquisitively.*)

BEN. Do you have some kind of a problem?

ELSIE. Why do you ask that?

BEN. Because, I somehow believe you're sane, but you make the most insane requests I ever heard of. How can you possibly expect a young man of normal impulses to spend the night sleeping in the same room with you in a separate bed?

ELSIE. Well, I ...

BEN. Don't you know what a man is *like*? What a man is *made of*?

ELSIE. Maybe I don't. I'm sorry. I guess maybe I do sound sort of crazy.

BEN. Well, we all have problems.

ELSIE. Look, you can sleep with me, if you like. It's just a single bed, but ...

BEN. I don't believe I've ever had such a tempting proposition.

ELSIE. I'm serious.

BEN. I *know* it.

ELSIE. And if you really want the sex thing, it's all right with me.

BEN. Somehow now, you've made the whole idea very resistible.

ELSIE. Well?

BEN. And you'd be compliant and allow me to perform the act of fornication just because you don't want me to say good night.

ELSIE. (*Nodding her head.*) Uh-huh!

BEN. Now I call that a rare example of feminine magnanimity.

ELSIE. I'll do my best to make you enjoy it, but ...

BEN. Look! Are you a virgin or something?

ELSIE. I should say not! I'm just as normal as any girl my age.

BEN. Then why are you putting up such resistance?

ELSIE. Because I ...

# THE APARTMENT COMPLEX

## SEVEN ONE-ACT PLAYS

by William Inge  
edited by Craig Pospisil

**MARGARET'S BED.** Elsie picks up Ben at the symphony and brings him back to the apartment she shares with Margaret, who is away for the night. Ben assumes that this is a prelude to sex, but truly Elsie is just desperate for Ben to sleep in Margaret's empty bed, because she has a pathological fear of sleeping in an empty apartment. (1 man, 1 woman.) **THE KILLING.** Mac meets Huey at a bar and brings him home to his apartment to share a bottle of whiskey, but this isn't the kind of pick-up you might think. Mac, who is a religious man and fears damnation, hopes to convince Huey, who does not believe, to kill him. (2 men.) **THE POWER OF SILENCE.** Teachers at the same school, Emma and Louise have been receiving mysterious phone calls, and when Emma answers, no one speaks. Louise is less disturbed by the calls, but they make Emma frantic, and she is sure that one of her students is responsible. After several silent calls, someone rings their door buzzer repeatedly. But who's there? (2 men, 2 women.) **PRODIGAL.** Terry is a troubled teen who's been arrested multiple times and is on probation. In fact, if his mother won't let him stay with her, Terry has to turn himself in and go back to "the farm." Nancy has a chance at a new life with a new husband, though, and she can't handle her son anymore. But her decision has dire consequences for others. (1 man, 2 women.) **THE CALL.** Joe has traveled to New York City from Billings, Montana for a Shriners-like convention and parade, but he is weighed down by his sense of failure and fear of a changing world. He can't even bring himself to stay with his successful actress sister and her husband in their tony apartment, preferring to drag his heavy suitcase to find a hotel room on a low floor. (2 men.) **THE LOVE DEATH.** Byron is a successful writer, living alone in a well-decorated apartment, who makes a series of calls to his mother, friends, and the critic who gave his last book of short stories a terrible review to let them know that he is about to commit suicide. (1 man, voices.) **MOVED-IN.** The super of the apartment complex, Mr. Flicker, is leaving, and the board has offered his job to Carlton. But Carlton, an African American who struggled to get admitted to the complex in the first place, isn't sure he wants to take the job and give up the hate he feels for many of his fellow tenants. (2 men, 1 woman.)

Also by William Inge

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