

PERUSAL SCRIPT

The Unfortunate
Courtship
of
Brian Tanner

A One Act Comedy

by
Jerry Argetsinger



Newport, Maine

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THE UNFORTUNATE COURTSHIP OF BRIAN TANNER

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Cast of Characters

Brian Tanner - 28 year old bachelor
May Tanner - His busy-body aunt, 55-65 years old
Matt Hoagan - 25 year old bachelor. Brian's best friend.
Ruth Walker - Early 30's, practical
Cheryl Howell - Mid 20's, very attractive
Betsy Caldwell - 18, naive

Setting:

Brian Tanner's General Store somewhere in South-Central Utah sometime in the late 1860's. Shelves, bins and barrels are stocked with bolts of fabric, food stuffs, and tools of the period. To the right is a counter, also displaying such things as peppermint stick filled jars. Behind the counter is a door that leads into the Tanner home. A door stage left leads outside. There might be a pot-bellied stove with chairs and a checkerboard set-up nearby and a window in the back wall that looks out onto the Utah desert.

Scene list:

Scene one: The General Store, afternoon
Scene two: Same, later the same evening
Scene three: Same, the next morning
Scene four: Same, four months later

Production History:

A quarter century ago I took a playwriting class at BYU, the result of which was *The Unfortunate Courtship of Brian Tanner*. Jean White, a directing student, produced it in the Nelke Experimental Theatre, January 18-19, 1971, with the following cast:

Brian Tanner	Sam Crain
Matt Hoagan	Mel Weyerman
Aunt May	Sheila McCleve
Ruth Walker	Jean Hagen
Cheryl Howell	Debby Miller
Betsy Caldwell	Linda Lee Brown

I turned to other projects, but *Unfortunate Courtship* took on a kind of life of its own. Through the years it has been produced in such diverse locations as Orem, UT, and Pittsford, NY. In 1997, when I was asked to direct a one-act play in my home ward in Rochester, NY, I recalled its success and excavated the script. While basically sound, it was in need of revision, so my cast and I had a great time discovering ways to tighten the story and heighten the humor. Our revised production opened February 12, 1997, with the following cast:

Brian Tanner	Samuel Schwendiman
Matt Hoagan	Justin VanDenBerghe
Aunt May	Nancy Juno
Ruth Walker	Marianne Reynolds
Cheryl Howell	Anna Schneider
Betsy Caldwell	Holly Baier

THE UNFORTUNATE COURTSHIP OF BRIAN TANNER by Jerry Argetsinger. 2M 3W 1TeenGirl. 1 Interior. About 30 minutes. Brian, a happy bachelor in frontier Utah, feels unwarranted pressure to find a bride. His Aunt May believes her prayers have been answered when the wagon belonging to three eligible women breaks down near their general store. While Aunt May plans some serious match making, Brian plots to present a distorted picture of himself that no one would want to marry. Wonderful for a production in a Ward or Stake, or as part of a Stake One-Act Play Festival. **Order # 2033**

**This play is for
Charles W. Whitman**

who inspired a generation of LDS playwrights

PERUSAL PAGES FILE -- The Unfortunate Courtship of Brian Tanner -- by Jerry Argetsinger

Scene One -- Brian Tanner and his Aunt May are working in the general store as they talk.

AUNT MAY: None the less, you'll be twenty-eight years old next week. If you followed Brigham Young's advice you would have been married ten years ago.

BRIAN: Don't go quoting him at me any more, Aunt May! Some men are ready for marriage before others. Just because he has twenty wives, so far, doesn't mean that everybody has to get tied down to any, or every, single girl that comes along.

AUNT MAY: I didn't mean it that way, Brian. It's . . . well, you need a woman who has a special love for you.

BRIAN: I have one, Aunt May . . .

(She brightens up.)

You!

AUNT MAY: *(Deflated.)* I'm no substitute for a wife. The sooner you get married, the sooner you'll know just how wrong you are.

BRIAN: *(Looking into her eyes.)* You know, for a matchmaker, you'd make a great blacksmith!

(Matt enters through the general store door.)

AUNT MAY: That's all I ever get from you. Will you ever get serious and find out what life is all about?

MATT: Now, Aunt May, you know you don't really want Brian to get married.

AUNT MAY: I don't?

MATT: If he got married you wouldn't have anyone to fuss over.

AUNT MAY: *(To Brian)* I can't argue with both you and Matt.

(She starts to exit into the house)

MATT: Not so fast, Aunt May!

(Takes a letter from his pocket)

You'll be interested in this.

AUNT MAY: Why, who would write to me?

MATT: *(Joking)* No one I know. It's for Brian -- from Brigham Young's office!

BRIAN: I didn't do anything!

MATT: Who said you did. It's probably to congratulate your celibacy.

BRIAN: *(He has opened the letter. Aunt May tries to position herself to read over his shoulder.)* If you don't mind, I'd like to read it by myself, first.

(He exits into the house)

AUNT MAY: *(After Brian is gone.)* When is that man going to get interested in women?

MATT: Oh, he's interested, all right! He just doesn't want to marry any of them!

AUNT MAY: He always complains that he doesn't want to marry some girl he grew up with. Says it would be like marrying his sister.

MATT: I don't think he wants to marry anyone.

AUNT MAY: If only some new blood . . . some fresh women would move to town.

MATT: Yeah! The fresher the better!

AUNT MAY: Matt Hoagan, you know what I mean.

MATT: *(Coyly.)* Apparently you haven't heard about the young ladies that pulled in this morning.

AUNT MAY: No . . .

MATT: Three Salt Lake women. They're on their way to Arizona, but they'll be here a few days for wagon repairs.

PERUSAL PAGES FILE -- The Unfortunate Courtship of Brian Tanner -- by Jerry Argetsinger

AUNT MAY: My prayers have been answered! Do they have a place to stay?

MATT: I don't think so. No one really knows they need help yet.

AUNT MAY: You go straight over there and tell all three of them to come stay with us.

MATT: All of them?

AUNT MAY: That's the only way Brian will get a chance to know each of them. Maybe one will be to his liking.

MATT: Don't get your hopes up. It'll be a snowy day in July when Brian gets married.

(Brian enters, starts to say something, then stops.)

AUNT MAY: What's the matter, Dear?

BRIAN: It's nothing . . .

AUNT MAY: It must be something or you wouldn't be affected like this.

BRIAN: Really, Aunt May. It's nothing.

MATT: The president of the Church wouldn't write you a letter for nothing.

BRIAN: All right. Listen. "Dear Brother Tanner. It has come to my attention that you, as one of the leading Elders in your Branch, have not yet selected one of the Daughters of Zion to be your companion for time and all eternity. Brother Tanner, by not fulfilling this most important function, you are not honoring your priesthood, nor following the council of the Lord. It is my admonition that you seriously bring this matter up between yourself and the Lord and prepare to receive the wife whom He has prepared for you. Sincerely, Brigham Young."

AUNT MAY: That's wonderful! If you'd done what I told you President Young would have never had to write. I've got to get the house ready. Matt, you go over there right away like I told you.

(She exits into the house)

BRIAN: What's that all about?

MATT: It's . . . nothing.

BRIAN: What kind of scheme is she working up?

MATT: Your aunt wants me to invite some young ladies to stay with you for a few days.

BRIAN: Which young ladies?

MATT: They're from Salt Lake City. Three of them are stranded here for a few days until their wagon is repaired.

BRIAN: Where is she going to put three women?!

MATT: Knowing Aunt May, she'll fit them in somewhere.

BRIAN: I don't care what she wants. I will not get married until I find the girl I want to marry!

MATT: Settle down for a minute!

BRIAN: That's easy for you to say. She's not trying to run your life.

MATT: Give her a chance! As soon as she has yours taken care of, she'll start on mine. You know she's only trying to help you.

BRIAN: That's not the kind of help I need.

MATT: Think! You'll sound like you're going against Brigham Young if you complain now.

BRIAN: You know I'm not. But . . . you're right. What do you think I should do?

MATT: I'm not sure. But you'd better be careful.

(The women are heard off-stage. Brian and Matt turn to watch as Ruth, Cheryl and Betsy enter the store.)

RUTH: *(To the other two women.)* Flour, sugar, coal-oil and lard. Do you think we'll need anything else?

CHERYL: We could use some bachelors.

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RUTH: Cheryl! You'll never find a husband by acting like some floozy!

BETSY: That's right, Cheryl.

BRIAN: What can I do for you ladies?

RUTH: We're stranded here a few days for wagon repairs. We need a few extra provisions.

BRIAN: Then . . . you've found someone to stay with?

RUTH: There's too many of us to impose on anyone, so we'll be camping down by the river.

AUNT MAY: (*Entering*) Oh no you're not! It's too cold and dangerous out there!

BRIAN: Aunt May! It's neither cold nor dangerous. They'll be just fine by the river.

AUNT MAY: We've got plenty of room here. Let me introduce myself. I'm May Tanner, but everyone calls me Aunt May. And this is my nephew, Brian.

RUTH: We're happy to meet you, but we just couldn't accept.

AUNT MAY: Nonsense. I heard you were in town and I already fixed a place for you.

BETSY: Isn't that the sweetest thing you ever heard?

CHERYL: Don't get too excited, Betsy.

(*To Aunt May.*)

Where could you possibly put all three of us?

AUNT MAY: One of you can share my room and the other two can sleep in Brian's room.

BRIAN: Aunt May!

(*Matt laughs.*)

CHERYL: But where will Brian . . . and his wife stay?

AUNT MAY: Don't worry about him! He can sleep in here on the floor.

CHERYL: You mean, you haven't got a wife?

MATT: (*Thoroughly enjoying himself.*) No. He's not married . . . yet!

RUTH: Now Cheryl, if we're going to be staying here, you must be on your best behavior.

CHERYL: Don't worry, Ruth.

(*Sexily.*)

I will be.

MATT: I will be, too! I've always believed people should try their best.

AUNT MAY: You just be quiet, Matt Hoagan!

(*To the ladies.*)

It's settled then.

RUTH: We'll be happy to accept your invitation. I'm Ruth Walker and this is Cheryl Howell.

CHERYL: (*Offering her hand for Brian to shake.*) Delighted.

(*Brian busies himself with something, pretending that he didn't see her extend her hand.*)

RUTH: And this is little Betsy Caldwell.

BETSY: You're just the nicest people I ever met!

AUNT MAY: Now come with me into the house. The boys will be happy to go get your things.

(*All four women exit into the house.*)

RUTH: (*To Brian and Matt as she exits.*) I'll be back in a few minutes to tell you what we need.

BRIAN: (*Miserable.*) Wonderful. We'll be happy to help. Matt, do you think . . .

(*Matt breaks out laughing, making Brian mad.*)

All right!

MATT: I'm sorry. But you should have seen the look on your face.

BRIAN: Traitor!

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MATT: You know I'm on your side. You just don't see the humor in the situation.

BRIAN: That's right. I do fail to see the humor in this situation. How would you like it if everyone in the world teamed up against you?

MATT: It's not that bad. They weren't that bad looking either.

BRIAN: They weren't bad looking, were they! Did you get a good look at Cheryl?

MATT: Does the sun shine?

BRIAN: With her around I don't think you'd notice.

MATT: (*Teasing.*) You're not interested, are you?

BRIAN: Don't worry! I will not fall for one of my aunt's schemes.

MATT: Then what are you going to do?

BRIAN: Aunt May has to think that I'm trying to find a wife or she won't get off my back.

MATT: How are you going to make her think you are when you aren't?

BRIAN: I know! I'll pretend to be interested in one of the girls. Then, when it's time for them to go on to Arizona I'll just tell Aunt May that it didn't work out. Then I'll be back where I started . . . a free man!

MATT: What happens if the woman you pretend to be interested in falls madly in love with you?

BRIAN: I won't give them any ideas. I'll just let Aunt May think that I'm trying.

MATT: I'm not so sure it'll work. Salt Lake women only go to Arizona for one reason.

BRIAN: I know. To get married. There aren't enough men in Salt Lake.

MATT: That's right. So you know what they're after.

BRIAN: Maybe I could propose to all of them. That should fix their wagon until they get their wagon fixed.

MATT: What do you do if they accept?

BRIAN: If I can make myself obnoxious enough, they won't accept.

MATT: Out of three women, at least one will accept. What happens if more than one accepts? You can't handle one, let alone two or three.

BRIAN: Look who's talking! It wasn't me that had to go home last Saturday night and leave my date. I entertained my date and yours with no problem.

MATT: That's different. I got sick.

BRIAN: Oh yeah . . . "Awkward-i-tis!"

MATT: Back to the point. What are you going to do if any of them accept your gallant proposal?

BRIAN: I'll just play them off against each other.

MATT: That might just work. But . . . how are you going to propose?

BRIAN: One at a time.

MATT: I think you should ask the whole bunch at once.

BRIAN: And we can invite the neighbors in, too.

MATT: Think about it, Brian. Three desperate, man-hungry women, each thinking that she is the one and only . . .

BRIAN: I see your point.

MATT: You'd better put a lot of thought into this, Romeo.

BRIAN: Why don't you go home?

MATT: As a matter of fact, I do have to help Charley close up the livery stable. Good luck! You're going to need it.

BRIAN: Why don't you come around after supper. You could take one of them off my hands.

MATT: What would my girl think!

BRIAN: If you explain that you're going for sparking lessons, she'll drag you here!

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(Matt grabs a handful of beans and throws them at Brian who laughs and chases him out of the store.)

End of Scene One

Gerald Argetsinger, Ph.D. (Bowling Green State University), is an Associate Professor, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. He joined NTID in 1975, where he has taught a variety of courses and chaired two departments. Argetsinger has had a distinguished career in theater and film as a scholar, playwright, director and producer. He has authored a major study on the Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg including eight comedies by this Father of Scandinavian theatre, as well as numerous articles and essays on the literary and dramatic arts. He has published a dozen scripts and directed and produced a number of major theatrical productions, He is a nationally recognized director of outdoor drama, including the Hill Cumorah Pageant (for which he was the Artistic Director for nine years from 1987-97), the original production of *Utah!* in St. George, Utah, Trail of the Lonesome Pine (the Virginia State Outdoor Drama), and Equality of Rights: The First Women's Rights Convention (presented at the National Women's Rights Park, Seneca Falls, NY) and the historical dramas *Sword of Peace* and *Pathway to Freedom* at Greensboro, North Carolina. Of his other productions, he is particularly proud of directing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Quintero Theatre on Theatre Row in NYC (2000), and Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (2009), which examines a pertinent issue for gay Mormons: "What happens when someone's worship is taken from them?" Recent productions include Carol Lynn Pearson's *Facing East*--one performance of which was presented for his home stake, followed by a discussion led by the Stake President and a member of the Area Presidency. He is the founder of the Gay Mormon Literature Project wherein he has cataloged all published and/or produced narrative fiction and scripts containing gay Mormon themes and/or characters. This includes 4 films, 19 plays, 20 novels and 122 short stories Argetsinger has held a number of church callings and currently serves on the high council of the Rochester/Palmyra Stake. He is married to award winning costume designer, Gail (Bishop) Argetsinger and together they have raised two young sons.