

The Tragic Flute

Setting: Lounge Room, grand piano in corner, photos of Santa Paula Masonic masters on the wall.

Characters: Male, could be almost any adult age.

Costume: Many possibilities from work clothes to formal

He is seated at the piano. A sonata can be heard as the audience enters.

Oh, hello! I'm sorry I didn't hear you come in. I was practicing.

Oh, this. I don't actually play. Well at least I didn't before, you know, my demise? It's just something I picked up. We spirits have plenty of time on our hands for self improvement. Well some can't be bothered. We won't talk about them and they won't talk about us, right? Hah hah.

That was Mozart by the way. The music, not me. I'm definitely not Mozart. He was a Mason you know. Wrote an entire opera about it. Look it up if you don't believe me. He's around here somewhere — tours all the Masonic Halls. Stick around long enough and you might run into him. Great guy actually. Loads of laughs.

Anyway you probably didn't come to hear me talk about Mozart. Why did you come here anyway? Are you so dissatisfied with being alive that you have to go looking for dead people? Alright then, I suppose you want to know what happened to me. Well it all started with the construction of this beautiful new Masonic Lodge in 1931.

You know I was a mason too. No, I don't mean like these gentlemen here with all the whiskers, past masters of the lodge and whatnot. I mean a real mason. Come on you know what I'm talking about. A bricklayer! Yup I helped build this fine pile with my own two hands. But I never got to see it finished at least not in the usual way.

You see I was working up on the roof. We were getting ready to lay the last few rows of bricks right up at the parapet. The building's grand opening was all set and advertised. The entire town was invited, but the work was weeks behind schedule. It wasn't my fault it had turned into a rush job but you

wouldn't know it from that foreman. He was riding me like a horse thief. I tell you I was getting so sick of that guy telling me to hurry hurry hurry. What do you want, fast or right? I tell him. I want fast and right he says. Then he turns on his heel and off he goes. Yeah sure like that meathead ever laid a brick in his sorry life, and he's telling me?

It was the middle of July and it wasn't like Christmas up there on that roof if you know what I mean. As if the sun and the heat wasn't enough the roofers were starting to hot mop the tar paper with burning smokin' stinkin' asphalt. So the last thing I needed was that dope of a boss coming up that ladder every five minutes giving me what for. Here I am hauling hods of bricks up from the sidewalk on a block and tackle maybe three, four times an hour all day long, and that idiot waltzes up here to tell me how I ain't doin' it right.

So can you blame me if I was getting a little warm under the collar?

I says to myself if that little tyrant comes up here just one more time I'm gonna give him something to remember. Yeah you know I coulda set my watch by it. There he was right on time looking over my shoulder inspecting every little swipe of my trowel. Then he turns on his heel again and walks away. Can you believe it, he didn't say a thing. And saying nuthin was even worse because I could already hear what he was gonna say ringing in my ears.

Well I got the brick in my hand that I was just about to set into the mortar I'd slopped onto the wall. Instead of putting it there I hauled back and took a step into it like I was pitchin' a fastball across the middle of the plate. It was gonna be strike one right into that guy's noggin! What I forgot about was that block and tackle I was tellin' you about before. I suppose the rope was coiled around my back foot or something. Either way I kinda lost my balance and did a little skip-step forward instead.

So you think I ended up on the sidewalk don't ya? Nah that'd been way too easy. No instead I stepped right into the cavity between the inner and the outer walls. Down and down I slid between the bricks. Bricks I'd laid with my very own hands, mind you. Talk about your irony! I finally came to a stop when I hit a pipe, right about there.

It all happened so fast I guess nobody on the crew noticed, and that dumb foreman probably figured I'd walked off the job. Which I mighta done anyhow considering all the guff he'd been giving me, if it wasn't the middle of a

depression and all that. I was from out a town anyway drifting from one job to another like lots of other men back then so he wasn't gonna care about me one way or the other, coming or going. So right there is where I stayed.

You know a man can absorb a lot culture hanging around place like this. I got to see that grand opening after all, and lots of things after that. You got your weddings and your funerals and your lodge meetings and your Rotary Club meetings and your dances and your socials. Nearly a hundred years worth by now. This lounge has been full of so many people over the years, well, you kinda lose count. And then I spotted the piano.

I got to say, the afterlife has never been boring, especially after I started with the playing. So maybe I ended up where I was meant to be after all. Beats laying bricks that's for sure, I guess I was never really cut out for that. So if you're walking down this street some night and hear music drifting out of the building when it's all dark inside, well, you just tell 'em it's Mozart.