

THE SCHARTZ- METTERKLUME METHOD

A Comedy in One Act

By Burton Bumgarner

*Adapted from the story
by Saki (H.H. Munro)*

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Based on a short story by H.H. Munro (Saki), **The Scharz-Metterklume Method** is a delicious tale of conventional manners and expectations turned topsy-turvy. When an upper-class Long Island family goes to meet their new English governess, they make a mistake and bring home Lady Carlotta, the only woman they could find in the airport with an British accent. Carlotta plays along. Her eccentricities at first delight the parents, whose four children have been the cause of past governesses' psychological breakdowns. The mother likes the idea of education being interesting and relevant to children, the father prefers discipline. Carlotta claims to teach by the "Scharz-Metterklume" method of instruction, which has her young charges acting out their lessons. Mathematics means learning to play poker, Latin is learning pig-latin, and science is a lesson on the solar system, and how close to the sun Carlotta can toss the children if they don't behave. Chaos reigns with history, when Carlotta has the four children act out the founding of Rome. The lesson involves yelling and screaming and kidnapping the daughters of a neighbor. The parents send Carlotta back to the airport, where she meets the real governess, whose flight had been delayed. Carlotta, in her inimitable way, gives the young woman plenty of advice, getting in the last word after all.

Approximate running time:

35 minutes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(with doubling 3 m, 7 w)

LADY CARLOTTA: An English lady.

MRS. QUABARL: The mother, American, who has come to meet the new governess at the airport.

MR. QUABARL: The father, American and nouveau riche.

CLAUDE QUABARL: The eldest Quabarl child.

WILFRID QUABARL: The next eldest.

IRENE QUABARL: The younger sister of Claude and Wilfrid.

VIOLA QUABARL: The youngest Quabarl child.

MISS HOPE: The new governess.

TWO GIRLS: The daughters of a lawyer living next door.

MINOR PARTS WHICH CAN BE DOUBLED:

ANNOUNCER (Voice only)

A PORTER

A WOMAN

A CHILD

Setting: Main set is the parlor of the Quabarl's upper class home somewhere on Long Island. The airport may be the apron of the stage with the curtain pulled.

Time: The present.

Props: Suitcases, pot of tea, cups, tray of sweets, golf club.

The Schartz-Metterklume Method

(AT RISE: Kennedy Airport, New York. CARLOTTA, wearing a hat, is standing DS waiting impatiently for her flight. She paces back and forth. A PORTER enters SL loaded down with suitcases. As he reaches CS the suitcases begin to fall. Carlotta crosses to the porter and begins to help him gather up the cases. He is appalled that a well-dressed lady would help him.)

PORTER: No, ma'am! Don't! You're all dressed up!

CARLOTTA: Don't be silly! You cannot possibly manage such a consignment! Isn't there anyone around here to assist?

PORTER: Please, ma'am. I can manage. *(CARLOTTA takes several of the cases.)*

CARLOTTA: Now, where are we going?

PORTER: Ma'am, you mustn't! It ... it won't look right!

CARLOTTA: Young man. I only once participated in the doctrine of non-interference. A friend of mine, who had only recently lectured me on the importance of staying out of other people's business, found herself in a most precarious situation.

PORTER: Ma'am?

CARLOTTA: I was making a watercolor sketch of a fence, a tree, and young woman. The fence and tree were located in a rural setting near Brighton, and my friend supplied the role of the young woman. No sooner had I begun my sketching than I heard angry grunting and desperate screaming, and I looked up to find my friend had climbed the tree to avoid an angry wild boar whose territory she had trespassed upon. Following my friend's advice on the importance of minding my own business, I refused to intervene between the boar and his prisoner. Safely on the other side of the fence, I continued with my sketching. I'm afraid it led to the loss of friendship.

PORTER: Ma'am, I don't know what you're talking about.

CARLOTTA: Why don't you show me where these cases belong, and we can both be about our business.

(The PORTER leads CARLOTTA off SR. The voice of the ANNOUNCER is heard.)

ANNOUNCER: Flight 1109 to London now boarding at gate 15-C.

(CARLOTTA returns and crosses DSC.)

CARLOTTA: The flight is late. Again. I hope those fools haven't lost my luggage.

(A MOTHER and CHILD enter SR. The child is struggling, the mother impatient. CARLOTTA watches. The child finally sits down and refuses to move.)

MOTHER: *(Sweetly.)* Come on, dear. We have to make the flight. We can't be late.

CHILD: I want candy!

MOTHER: *(Meekly.)* You have been very naughty. Naughty children should not get candy.

CHILD: I want candy NOW!

MOTHER: We are going to miss the plane. Please stand up and act like a gentleman. *(Or lady.)*

CHILD: *(Kicks and screams.)* NO! NO! NO!

CARLOTTA: Well. This will not do. *(SHE crosses to the CHILD.)* See here! This will not do! Do you hear me?

MOTHER: Who do you think you're talking to?

CARLOTTA: I am talking to that horrible child!

MOTHER: *(Aghast.)* Why ... why ... how dare you! What makes you think you can just ... just ...

CHILD: *(To CARLOTTA.)* Go away!

MOTHER: Now, now. Let's not get all excited. *(To CARLOTTA, excited.)* You're getting the child all excited!

CARLOTTA: We have gone beyond all excited. We are now being thoroughly dreadful.

CHILD: SHUT UP!

MOTHER: Let's not use language like that, dear. It isn't very nice. *(CARLOTTA takes the CHILD by the collar.)*

CARLOTTA: Stand up, you nasty brat! *(Pulls the CHILD to his feet.)*

MOTHER: What do you think you're doing?

CARLOTTA: I am going to take this wretched child out of earshot and administer a thorough trashing!

MOTHER: *(Horried.)* You'll do no such thing! He's *(She's)* very sensitive!

CARLOTTA: Sensitive my foot! *(Drags the CHILD SL.)*

MOTHER: What makes you think you can do something like this?

CARLOTTA: I have already explained the doctrine of non-interference once today. That should be sufficient. *(Exits dragging CHILD. MOTHER anxiously follows.)*

MOTHER: I'll have you arrested! Help! Police!

(The voice of the ANNOUNCER is heard.)

ANNOUNCER: This is the last boarding call for flight 1109 non-stop to London at gate 11-C.

(CARLOTTA enters.)

CARLOTTA: I do not understand people in this country. All that child needed was a good boxing of the ears and a tanning of the bottom. And that silly policeman stopped me. How absurd! Now, when are they going to announce that London flight?

(MRS. QUABARL enters and looks around. She crosses to CARLOTTA.)

MRS. QUABARL: You must be Miss Hope, the governess I've come to meet.

CARLOTTA: Very well. If I must, I must.

MRS. QUABARL: I am Mrs. Quabarl. Where is your luggage?

End of Freeview

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