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SF PERUSALS

Nasty Things, Murders

A Play for Women

Arthur Lovegrove

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-03354-4

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CHARACTERS

Ethel

Louise

Madge

Mary

The Matron

The action takes place on a winter's evening in the lounge of the Grantley Home for Retired Gentlewomen

Time – the present

NASTY THINGS, MURDERS

The lounge of the Grantley Home for Retired Gentlewomen. A winter's evening

It is a comfortably furnished room with a large settee in front of which is a television set, with the back facing the audience, standing on a small table. There are two armchairs, one slightly apart. In the back wall are windows across which curtains are drawn, and against another wall is an escritoire on top of which is a telephone. A door leads off to the hall

The CURTAIN *rises to reveal four old ladies, all in their late sixties or early seventies. They are all dressed in a manner which can be described as neat but not gaudy—not too smart but certainly far from shabby. They wear their favourite pieces of jewellery and each has a handbag or reticule. In fact, they look what they are—retired gentlefolk. Ethel, sardonic and rather aristocratic; Madge, a short, tubby woman; Louise, smallish and excitable; and Mary, gentle and sweet looking*

Ethel is standing in front of the television set banging it with her hand. Madge and Louise are seated side by side on the settee facing it, and Mary is seated in the armchair which is slightly away from the others, placidly knitting

Ethel (*with a final vicious bang on top of the set*) There! (*She steps back and surveys it*)

Louise Not a thing! Oh, this is infuriating! (*She bangs her clenched hands on her knees in exasperation*) Oh, why did it have to go wrong then!

Madge Try the left-hand side slightly above the middle, dear.

Ethel I've banged everywhere. How could I have missed the left-hand side slightly above the middle! If I have, it's the only part I haven't thumped apart from the screen, and I'd like to put my foot through that.

Madge From past experience I've found that if you bang it there you jar the thingummybob attached to the whatsit.

Ethel Do you have to be so technical, Madge?

Louise Oh, can't somebody *do* something, please! We must know how it ends. (*Again she bangs her fists on her knees in annoyance*)

Madge Let me try, Ethel dear. (*She rises*)

Ethel You're the expert, be my guest. (*She steps back and reseats herself on the settee*)

Madge goes to the set and carefully selects her spot with the precision of a surgeon about to make an incision. She suddenly hits it sharply twice and steps back to survey the result

Louise There! Nothing! Oooooh, I could scream!

Madge That's odd, it's always worked before.

Ethel Perhaps your diagnosis was wrong. It's probably the how-doyoudo attached to the whatdoyoucallit that's gone, and God only knows where they are.

Madge We'll have to get Matron to ring the service department.

Louise And what good will that do?

Ethel They'll send a mechanic along and Madge will baffle him with technicalities.

Louise (*wailing*) But that won't be until tomorrow and we will have missed the programme.

Madge Never mind, Louise, they'll probably repeat it. They always do.

Louise But I can't possibly wait that long. Oooooh, I could scream! I won't be able to sleep tonight wondering who did it.

Madge (*comfortably*) Never mind, dear, I'll give you one of my sleeping tablets.

Louise But I do mind. I love mysteries.

Ethel Then you should be in your element because you are now mystified.

Louise But I must know who did it. Oooooh, that—that—beastly set would go wrong tonight. Can't anybody remember the case?

Madge I never remember murders, not even big ones, and this one happened twenty years ago.

Ethel I can't even remember a murder that happened last month. If it comes to that I can't always remember what I did last week.

Madge In any case, why should we remember? Even the BBC didn't expect us to.

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