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SF PERUSALS

Dear Millie

A Comedy in One Act

by Fred Carmichael

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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STORY OF THE PLAY

"Dear Millie" is the title of a Lonely Hearts column which Millie Tyson writes She has a summer home in New England close to her three best friends They have decided that Millie is getting a little too conceited with her advice-giving and devise a plot where they will confide in her that each of their husbands is secretly seeing their best friends Millie is no one's fool and artfully turns the tables on them before her secretary brings about another surprise—twist ending The sixth character is a country maid who has problems of her own The dialogue is bright and witty and the plot full of surprises

CHARACTERS

BETTY

ELOISE MATTHEWS

LUCILLE JAMISON

JOSEPHINE KRAMER

MILLIE TYSON

JULIA CORLEY

SCENE Living room of the Tyson home.

TIME The present Summer

"DEAR MILLIE"

(*The curtain opens to show us a living room in a country home It is a homey and comfortable room in the house of Millie Tyson* U C *is an archway which leads to the outside door off* L *and to the kitchen and the rest of the house off* R *A small table stands to the* R *of the archway with a bottle of sherry and some glasses on it* D R *is a pair of French windows which lead to the outside and the gardens* R *stage is a woman's desk with chair matching it on the* R *side of it The desk is almost perpendiculor to the audience but is on a slight* C *angle To the* L *of the desk is a rather comfortable straight chair There are the usual necessities of working life on the desk and an extremely large pile of mail On stage* L *is a comfortable sofa with a small table to the left of it An easy chair is below the table and to the left of it Attractive and feminine paintings cover the walls* NOTE *The play can easily be presented in drapes as it is not necessary for any of the doors to be practical*)

BETTY (*Off stage* L) You can wait in the parlor, Mrs Matthews (*She enters followed by* ELOISE MATTHEWS. BETTY *is a young country domestic She speaks with a country accent and is most of the time cheery with what life has to offer She wears a cotton dress with an apron over it* ELOISE *is in her late forties The time is summer and she is smartly dressed as if she were about to go to the Club or a fashion show*) I don't rightly know when Mrs Tyson will be back She just said Tuesday.

ELOISE (*Removes her gloves and crosses above desk, putting the gloves in her purse*) The way *she* drives she can make it from New York in four hours. Anyone else would take seven

BETTY Not with that Jackal she's got

ELOISE (*Pauses in her movement*) Betty, it's a Jaguar.

BETTY I know'd it was some kind of animal

ELOISE It's remarkable, Betty, how like your sister you are.

BETTY (*Moves* D C) Hyacinth and me is sometimes taken for twins 'cept she's eleven months older than me She says we got a better kitchen than you

ELOISE (*Crosses above desk to French windows and indicates the gardens*) And a better garden and a better view and your mistress makes more money than my husband.

BETTY But Mrs Tyson works real hard for it It takes her and Miss Kramer a whole morning every day just to answer the mail (*Indicates piles of mail on desk*) To say nothing of all the time they spend writing that column. I sure wouldn't be bright enough to do that

ELOISE No, Betty, but the average person would

BETTY Yes, ma'am (*Thinks a minute to decide whether she has been insulted or not*)

ELOISE When you write a Lonely Hearts column, all you have to do is answer questions (*Sits* L *of desk*) If there aren't any good questions, you just make them up

BETTY Mrs Tyson, don't never do that It'd be dishonest

ELOISE (*Takes cigarette from her purse*) I must say I respect her for working I don't know what I'd do if my husband died and left me without any insurance I'd never be able to get a job good enough to keep up the place in the city and come to New Hampshire every summer (*Lights cigarette*)

BETTY I sure hope I marry someone rich My Dellwood ain't, he's just a hand on Mr Simon's farm He got a raise, though Now he's driving the manure spreader

ELOISE That sounds delightful

BETTY It's all right, of course, but after he's had a hard day in the fields, I gotta be sure and walk on the windward side of him

ELOISE And pray for a steady breeze

BETTY (*Starts for door*) Would you like me to mix you one of them cocktail things, Mrs Matthews?

ELOISE It's too early. Besides, your martinis are one to one I'll settle for a sherry Did any of the other girls phone today?

BETTY (*Pours sherry at table* U R) You mean Mrs Corley or Mrs Jamison? Not yet

ELOISE I suppose I shouldn't call us girls, should I?

BETTY Well, it does sound funny like (*Brings sherry to* ELOISE)

ELOISE I suppose I still think we're together in dancing school It doesn't seem long ago we were all in each other's weddings, paced the waiting rooms in hospitals when one of us was having a baby We've built each other up and pulled each other down when one of us needed it We all live within nine blocks in New York and we all have summer homes within ten miles up here And to each other, we're still girls (*Has crossed to sofa during above*)

BETTY You knew Mrs Tyson even before she wrote the column?

ELOISE I knew Millie when she failed penmanship in the fifth grade (*Sits sofa*)

BETTY She don't have to worry now Miss Kramer types the column

ELOISE When her husband was alive, Millie dabbled with writing children's books, those things like "Nancy-Prancy Meets Chicky-Chick" and "Nancy-Prancy Meets Ducky-Duck" and "Nancy-Prancy Meets Godzilla" (BETTY *laughs*) Then this Dear Millie column came along, after her husband died, and she gave it a try Whoever would have thought it would come to this, syndicated throughout the country, two best-seller books out of it? Next thing, they'll have "I Love Millie" T-shirts for teenagers

BETTY I'd buy one and have her autograph it It's fun working for an important person

ELOISE (*Puts her glass on table by sofa*) Even one who knows it?

BETTY Oh, Mrs Tyson ain't conceited

ELOISE (*Sarcastic*) Uh-huh (*Rises and crosses to French windows*) You don't have to stay and entertain me, Betty I'll just wait a few more minutes

BETTY OK If you want Miss Kramer, she's down in the garden by the cosmos I told her Dellwood could come over and help her but she says she's spread her own manure for years

ELOISE She's reviewing the column

BETTY (*Crosses to U C*) Well, I'll get back to my

kitchen. If my apple pie has dropped, I'll just flip it over and call it an upside-down cake. (*Exits to kitchen*)

(ELOISE *puts her cigarette out in ash tray on desk and starts going through the mail on the desk. Doorbell rings*)

ELOISE I'll get it, Betty.

BETTY (*Off stage*) That's good.

ELOISE (*Goes out and to the* L.) Lucille, it's—

LUCILLE (*Off stage*) Oh, Eloise. (LUCILLE CORLEY *enters. She is the same age as* ELOISE *and obviously rather well off. At the moment, she is in a state. She has a handkerchief to her eyes. She leans* U. C *and speaks very dramatically.*) My life is over. The future is doomed. I face old age, sad and embittered. (*Buries her face in the handkerchief*)

ELOISE (*Has entered and regards* LUCILLE) Millie isn't here yet.

LUCILLE (*Drops the handkerchief and the dramatics*) Oh.

ELOISE (*Crosses below* LUCILLE *to above the table for her sherry*) You can save the histrionics.

LUCILLE I was doing well, though, wasn't I? I really felt the part like I was Joan Crawford in one of those movies where she's lost Spencer Tracy.

ELOISE Lucille, I think the hand to the forehead was more Theda Bara, wasn't it?

LUCILLE Don't criticize me. Remember when I was in high school, I played Portia in The Merchant of Wherever-it-was. Where's Millie?

ELOISE (*Sits in the chair* D L.) She hasn't gotten home yet. Have some sherry.

LUCILLE I need it! (*Pours herself some*) Maybe this isn't such a good idea after all.

ELOISE Nonsense, Lucille, it's the best practical joke we've ever thought of. Besides, Millie's getting a little too conceited about this Lonely Hearts business. She needs to be taken down a peg.

LUCILLE (*Crosses* C. *Starts giggling*) It will really be wonderful if it works, though. I can't wait to see her face

ELOISE But you'd better underplay a little

LUCILLE I have never been accused of that

ELOISE No, dear, you haven't

LUCILLE (*Sits on the sofa*) I wish we had the lines written down for us I'm much better at learned pieces than improvising

ELOISE We can't write down the lines because we don't know what Millie will say Just keep the basic plot in mind and you'll be fine

LUCILLE I'd be so embarrassed coming to Millie for help if it were all true

ELOISE It's so far-fetched, Millie is bound to believe it.

LUCILLE (*Laughs*) Can't you just see me meeting your husband for a clandestine rendezvous? Fred and me together being romantic—it's ludicrous.

ELOISE And what's wrong with Fred?

LUCILLE Nothing, darling He's an angel

ELOISE And what about me going out with Julia's husband? Franklin's so pudgy Another year and he'll be as bald as a billiard ball

LUCILLE And Julia with my husband Why, Ford would never give her a second look

ELOISE Oh, I don't know The girls at the beauty parlor say he's the kind with a wandering eye

LUCILLE (*Rises and crosses* C) Ford? Don't be ridiculous (*Pauses as she begins to doubt*) What have you heard—exactly?

ELOISE Nothing, darling Not a thing, but where there's smoke .

LUCILLE I want to know who's doing the smoking

ELOISE I haven't the faintest idea Thank heavens I'm safe with Fred Him you can trust

LUCILLE Why not? He's gotten that middle-age spread (*Replaces her sherry glass on the table* U R) He doesn't exercise at the Club like Ford does Ford says while he and Franklin are doing push-ups, the only thing Fred is raising is another martini

ELOISE He's just jealous

LUCILLE (*Crosses above desk Gives a fake laugh*) Ha! Ha! Ha!

ELOISE (*Rises and crosses* C) Now, stop it, Lucille, this

isn't the time to gossip Let's both admit no one knows what a husband does when he isn't around but they're good providers.

LUCILLE (*Crosses to French windows*) I agree

ELOISE (*Puts her glass on table* U R) The thing is we must make Millie fall for our stories She's got to believe each of our husbands is having secret meetings with one of us She'll be confused, she'll try to have a little talk with each of us It'll be delicious

LUCILLE I think the whole plan is marvelous but why do we have to pretend we're going to art classes?

ELOISE (*Crosses below sofa*) Don't be stupid Can any of the three of us draw a straight line?

LUCILLE Not even with a ruler!

ELOISE So we tell Millie that each of us is taking art lessons but that's really an excuse to meet the other one's husband at Lookout Rock

LUCILLE (*Moves below desk*) Did you ever think of writing for "True Romances"?

ELOISE Leave the writing to Millie

LUCILLE (*Crosses* U C *to archway*) If she ever gets here (*Turns*) What about Julia? Where is she?

ELOISE (*Crosses below desk to* R *of it*) Maybe we ought to phone her We shouldn't all be here together If we are, we can't tell our stories to Millie privately (*Holds receiver of phone towards* LUCILLE) You phone Julia and tell her to wait another ten minutes or so.

LUCILLE (*Crosses to* L *of desk*) You phone her You're the chief of this gang

ELOISE (*Dials four numbers*) All right I always have to end up doing everything When we were campfire girls, I was the only one who could make a fire in the rain without matches

LUCILLE There was that one time I did and then the Chief caught me using Mother's cigarette lighter

(JOSEPHINE KRAMER *enters She is* MILLIE'S *secretary and friend, a little younger than the others, bright and efficient She has been gardening and is in a cotton dress, her hair a little untidy and obviously she is quite warm*)

JO Oh, good morning Betty didn't tell me you were here

ELOISE (*Into phone*) Hello Oh, sorry, wrong number (*Hangs up quickly*)

LUCILLE (*Trying to help* ELOISE) My, the phone service certainly is bad lately, isn't it?

JO I never seem to have any trouble Millie isn't back yet

ELOISE We know

JO (*Crosses below desk to* L C) I've just been doing some weeding, but it got so hot out there, I'm completely dehydrated I've got a thing for this New Hampshire spring water, anyway

ELOISE Water's fattening

LUCILLE I wish they'd make dietetic water.

JO You girls don't have to worry You always look lovely

ELOISE
LUCILLE } We agree (*They all laugh*)

ELOISE Heavens, Jo, don't stop on our account Far be it from us to take up your time, or rather Millie's time she's paying you for We'd just about decided to leave, anyway

JO If you don't mind I do want to finish that one border of nasturtiums before Millie gets here

ELOISE (*Goes to her and politely starts edging her towards the door*) Run along, then Have your water We'll be perfectly all right

JO You're sure?

LUCILLE (*Trying to be nonchalant, she crosses* R *of desk*) Positive

(ELOISE *gives* JO *the final slight push and she exits towards the kitchen*)

ELOISE That was close Poor Julia (*Dials again from* L *of desk*) I don't know what she must have thought.

LUCILLE Maybe she's mad I'd be angry if you hung up on me

ELOISE (*Into phone*) Julia, it's Eloise again, darling. I know I didn't get the wrong number, but we're at

Millie's and Jo just came in Look, Millie isn't here yet. Lucille's here with me and we thought we'd better go and come back when Millie's here. You know, one at a time . . What?

LUCILLE What is it?

ELOISE She says

LUCILLE (*Can't stand it another minute, grabs the phone*) What are you saying, Julia? Perfect (*To* ELOISE) She says we can park down by the brook and when we see Millie's car come in we can follow

ELOISE (*Grabs phone back*) Good work, Julia . . What?

LUCILLE (*Takes phone back again*) What is it? . . . (*To* ELOISE) She forgot where we were supposed to have the rendezvous—

ELOISE (*Takes phone back again*) Lookout Rock (*To* LUCILLE) She thought it was the Municipal Reservoir Picnic Grounds.

LUCILLE Doesn't sound very romantic

ELOISE (*Into phone*) Yes, Julia, you pretend you're carrying on with Ford, Lucille is with Fred, and I'm with your poor Franklin What? (LUCILLE *grabs for phone, but* ELOISE *hangs on*) No, you don't I can answer her questions You're a hog (*Into phone*) Not you, darling I said Lucille is a hog (*To* LUCILLE) She agrees

LUCILLE I don't know how this whole thing started

ELOISE (*Into phone*) No, Julia, we can't (*To* LUCILLE) She wants another rehearsal.

LUCILLE So do I.

ELOISE (*Into phone*) We ran through the whole thing at the pool yesterday All we have to do is make Millie believe we're carrying on with each other's husbands Just be convincing, Julia, the way you are when you make your report for the Dried Grass Section of the Garden Club

LUCILLE Tell her not to overplay.

ELOISE (*Into phone*) Lucille says not to overplay . . . What? (*Laughs.*)

LUCILLE What did she say?

ELOISE It's best you never know (*Surprised and alert, she listens into the phone again*) She is? (*To* LUCILLE)

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