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WORLD WITHOUT MEN

A Fantastical Comedy for Women
in One Act

by
PHILIP JOHNSON

SAMUEL



FRENCH

LONDON
NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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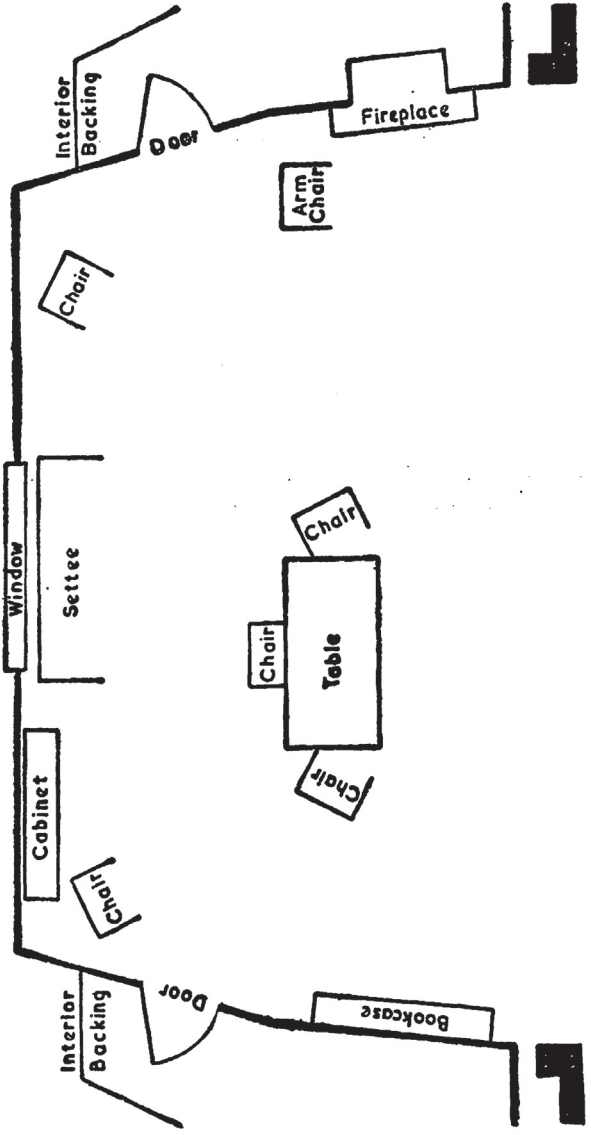
**TO
NELTO**

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MILLETT
MISS WISPER
MADAME PAVEL
MRS. SMITH
MRS. JONES
MRS. ROBINSON
MRS. BROWN

*The action of the play takes place in the morning-room of
MADAME PAVEL's house on a morning in July.*

Exterior Backing



WORLD WITHOUT MEN

The morning-room of MADAME PAVEL's house is large and lofty, with walls painted a deep cream. The one window, c. back, is covered with curtains of thin yellow net, through which can dimly be seen the red-brick façades of the houses on the other side of the street. The fireplace is down L., and above this is a door; another door is c. of the R. wall. The room is furnished well, and with discriminating taste. In the c. is a square solid-looking table, upon which are papers, periodicals, apparently of scientific interest, and a telephone; an easy chair is by the fireplace, and several other chairs are disposed about the room. A few paintings, original examples of the modern trend in art, are on the walls.

See Ground Plan of the Scene.

When the CURTAIN rises, it is shortly before midday on a morning in July, and the summer sun, streaming through the net curtains, floods the room with golden light. . . . In some remote part of the house an electric bell rings. There is a second or two of silence, then the door up R. opens, and MILLETT, MADAME's elderly parlourmaid, enters, crosses to the door L., opens it, and goes out. A moment later she reappears, ushering in MISS WISPER. The latter, a woman journalist, is young, no more than 23 or 24, pretty, and wearing a smart and serviceable-looking costume. She is clearly a most efficient and business-like young woman, though on this present occasion her manner betrays the fact that she is extremely tired.

MILLETT (as she re-enters from the door up L.). Will you please wait in here, Miss? Madame's out, but she'll be back presently.

MISS WISPER (crossing and sitting R. of table). Thank you. You don't think she'll be very long, do you?

MILLETT. I'm sure she won't; especially as you say you've an appointment.

MISS WISPER. She rang up the editor of my paper about an hour ago, and asked him if he'd send one of his reporters along.

MILLETT (*staring at her*). Reporter?

MISS WISPER. That's what I am, you know.

MILLETT (*rather blankly*). Oh!

MISS WISPER. You oughtn't to be surprised that there are women reporters, seeing that your mistress is the greatest scientist of the day—even though she does happen to be a woman.

MILLETT (*vaguely*). Oh, yes—course. Ah, well. (*She turns to go, then pauses by the door R.*) I say, miss, what you want to sit there for? Why not try that chair? (*Indicating the easy chair.*)

MISS WISPER. Why? Is there anything wrong with the one I'm on?

MILLETT. Course not; only you look kinda tired, and that chair's more easy-like.

MISS WISPER (*smiling a little*). Thank you, but I'll stay here. I am tired, though: every bone in my body is aching with tiredness. (*Wearily.*) Up all night.

MILLETT (*shaking her head*). Ah, you never ought to do it, that you never ought. Flying in the face of nature, to go turning night into day, with all this dancing and careering about. I mayn't be a Bright Young Thing myself, but I know: I don't read the Sunday newspapers for nothing; 'ectic, that's what it is, 'ectic.

MISS WISPER. Good Lord! I haven't been dancing; I've been working.

MILLETT. Working?

MISS WISPER. Reporting the Duchess of Mainland's midnight charity show.

MILLETT. Oh. . . Well, it's a pity 'er charity don't bear the light of day.

MISS WISPER. Home at six, a few hours of sleep, then the telephone ringing, and the boss telling me to go and interview Madame Pavel. What a life!

MILLETT. The Boss?

MISS WISPER. My Editor.

MILLETT. Ah, a man. No consideration. I tell you what it is, miss: the world'd be a sight better without 'em.

(MILLETT turns and goes out R. MISS WISPER, left alone, gazes round the room, then yawns, picks up one of the periodicals, glances idly at it and puts it down again. She smiles a little, as though some rather amusing thought has just occurred to her, glances at the door through which MILLETT has gone out, and murmurs.)

MISS WISPER. I wonder. I wonder. A world without men! (And then, more slowly.) World without men.

(She leans back, and closes her eyes, as though the better to visualize an Adamless Eden. The next moment she opens them again and jerks upright, for the door up L. has opened again, and MADAME PAVEL has entered. MADAME is about 40, tall, of commanding appearance, with handsome, clear-cut features, and with a brisk and decisive manner that is slightly reminiscent of the lecture hall. Her dress is entirely concealed beneath a white overall.)

MADAME (as she enters). Ah, good morning, good morning.

MISS WISPER (who has risen). Good morning.

MADAME. The *Daily Wire*, I believe?

MISS WISPER. Yes, the editor sent me to——

MADAME. Quite right! Quite right! I told him it was most essential he should send a woman. (Glancing at her wrist-watch.) Dear me, I didn't realize it was so late. Would you mind sitting over here while we talk? (Indicating the chair L. of the table; she herself sits at the back of the table, facing the audience.)

MISS WISPER (crossing in front of the table and sitting). Thank you.

MADAME (picking up a pencil and commencing to tap it on the table). I wonder if you have the faintest idea as to why I've sent for you, Miss—Miss——

MISS WISPER. Wisper.

MADAME. Miss Wisper.

MISS WISPER. Well . . . I imagine you may have news of some new experiment you're engaged upon to give to the Press.

MADAME. You're quite right: I have. . . . This morning is to see the culmination of the greatest experiment I have ever embarked upon.

MISS WISPER (*impressed*). Indeed. I'm sure my editor will be—

MADAME (*silencing her with a gesture*). You are here, Miss Wisper, not so much to hear me describe it to you, as to be present at the actual manifestation, and to witness it for yourself. It will take place precisely at twelve o'clock.

MISS WISPER (*who can think of nothing else to say*). Oh, yes?

MADAME. You have heard, no doubt, of my previous activities in the Field of Science?

MISS WISPER (*enthusiastically*). Who hasn't?

MADAME. All that I have accomplished will pale into the most feeble insignificance before what is about to be demonstrated before you. (*Pausing, straightening a pile of the papers on the table, then resuming.*) You would not, Miss Wisper, describe the world in its present state as a perfect world?

MISS WISPER (*feelingly*). Indeed I would not!

MADAME. Indeed you would not! Quite so. But it's going to be! It's going to be!

MISS WISPER (*at a loss*). Is it?

MADAME (*nodding her head*). After twelve o'clock to-day. Think of it! At five to twelve the world will be as muddled and imperfect and impossible as it's been since the beginning of Time; at five past twelve all that will be changed, swept away; the wrinkles and creases in the face of civilization, so to speak, will all have been smoothed away.

MISS WISPER. It—it isn't a new sort of face-lifting you've invented, is it?

MADAME. Do I look like the sort of woman who

would devote her brain and energy to discovering new methods of lifting faces?

MISS WISPER. No, you don't: I must say, you do not.

MADAME (*with a faint smile*). My invention is of rather more significance.

MISS WISPER (*deferentially*). Of course.

MADAME (*after a short pause*). Tell me, what do you think of men?

MISS WISPER (*somewhat disconcerted by this*). Men?

MADAME. Yes. Do you—er—like them?

MISS WISPER. Well—really—I don't know. . . . I think I more or less accept them. I mean to say, I'm a business woman and I—

MADAME. I understand. You're not engaged?

MISS WISPER. Oh, no. I really have no time to think of that sort of thing. My profession—

MADAME. Exactly. (*Approvingly.*) You're a sensible young woman, I can see: I'm thankful your editor sent you. (*Rising, walking up c. to the window, pausing there for a second with her back to MISS WISPER, then wheeling round and facing her.*) Miss Wisper, are you beginning to guess what it is that I'm proposing to do?

MISS WISPER. I—I'm afraid I'm not, though I'm very curious.

MADAME (*dramatically—with a wide gesture*). I'm going to rid the world of men!

MISS WISPER (*staring at her*). You're going to—

MADAME (*continuing*). I'm going to make a clean sweep of them. After twelve o'clock to-day there won't be a single male creature, unborn or living, left upon the earth!

MISS WISPER (*rising—convinced that the most eminent scientist in the world has lost her reason*). But, Madame, you—

MADAME (*taking a step forward—commandingly*). Sit down, girl!

(MISS WISPER obeys.)

You think I'm talking nonsense? Is that it?

MISS WISPER (*trembling*). Oh, no, no.

MADAME (*with another step towards MISS WISPER*). But you do! I know exactly what's going on in your mind at this moment: you're thinking "She's mad! She's mad!"

MISS WISPER (*hastily*). Oh, no, no, no, indeed I'm not. How could I?

MADAME. How couldn't you? you mean. I'm not blaming you. It's the first thought that must flash across the mind of anyone to whom I say what I said to you just now, "She's mad!" (*More quietly.*) But I'm not, you know. Oh, no, Miss Wisper, I'm not mad. (*As MISS WISPER seems about to speak.*) No, you must listen to me. . . . You agreed just now that the world was imperfect. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder what might lie at the root of this imperfection?

MISS WISPER. Well, of course—there have been times when I've thought there must be something radically wrong somewhere.

MADAME. There is! Men! They're what's wrong with the world! Annihilate them, and at once, half the problems of the Universe will be solved; the remaining half will solve themselves in the ensuing six months. . . . The fact of the matter is, of course, that no civilization in which there is more than one sex can ever be anything by chaotic. False values, inequalities, unrest and discontent are inevitable. Unfortunately, there's no time just now for me to go over the whole argument with you: I can only ask you to accept what I tell you as the greatest of truths. (*With a wide gesture.*) A civilization composed of one sex will flow on untrammelled, unchecked, like a smooth wide river through a grassy plain; a civilization of two sexes will never be more than a mad and seething whirlpool into which humanity is plunged on the day of its birth, to be spun and tossed, bruised and battered. . . . Of course, Miss Wisper, I make no pretensions to originality of thought in this matter—the subject, indeed, forms the basis of the writings of Lu Fu Chu, the Chinese philosopher of the Ming Dynasty—but I do claim to be the first to search for and find a— (*Breaking off as a ring of the*

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