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Girlie

Dedicated to Christine Jennings

By Jack Jennings, her Uncle

Cast of Characters

Lucy/Trixie/Girlie Myers, the heroine

Mrs. Herrity, a building contractor

Fred Myers, Lucy's husband

Elly, a boarder

Birch, a boarder

Tommie, the "bunch" leader

Mrs. Sweeney, the lodging house owner

Carl, a friend of Trixie



Chronology of Events

1975 Lucy tells her secret to Mrs. Herrity

1925 October 1, Trixie meets new friends

October 2, Lucy tells Elly her secret

December 18, Thursday, Tommie and Carl talk

December 19, Friday, Trixie and Elly talk

December 20, Saturday, Trixie cancels dinner with Carl.

December 21, Sunday, Trixie makes her decision and calls Carl.

December 22, Monday, Carl and Trixie meet.

December 23, Tuesday, Fred shows up, and Lucy's story comes to an end.

1975 Lucy concludes her tale to Mrs. Herrity who gives her a special package

Act 1

Scene 1. Lucy's Secret

It is 1975 in the kitchen of a 125 year-old town house in the residential area situated behind the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, District of Columbia (referred to as "the District" or "D.C.").

Two late middle-aged women are talking as they walk down the corridor from the house's entrance vestibule to the kitchen. They enter the kitchen which has seen better days. A large table with chairs around it dominates the room. Dust from construction covers the room's surfaces.

LUCY

It's mighty nice of you to let me come in, Mrs. Herrity. I'll explain why I'm here once we get settled.

MRS. HERRITY

Well, when you appeared at the front door, you looked honest. Also, ya didn't ask me if I believed in Jesus Christ, and then offer me a pamphlet that would bring me salvation.

LUCY

No, no, that's something that I would never do.

MRS. HERRITY

You sounded kinda like some one who really needed to look this place over. Anyway, I was waiting for an electrician to discuss a certain job, and he's a no-show. So, I've some time. C'amon in, and rest your weary body.

LUCY

Looking around her, Lucy takes in all the details in the room. Then she smiles.

You know how certain things that happened in the past stand out in your memory, and later on you

realize how important they were in determining how your life turned out?

MRS. HERRITY

Of course, I do. I met my husband at a USO dance in Chicago. He'd just come back from fightin' in Korea. Well, I fell in love with him, and we moved to Washington, D.C. because there were more jobs here for vets. If I had not met Tim, today I would probably be a Chicago housewife goin' to Cubs and Bears games with my husband and kids.

LUCY

Well, the three months I spent in this building were that type of thing for me. I struggled with whether I should remain married or start over again?

MRS. HERRITY

Gosh, that was a really big decision.

LUCY

It sure was. Shortly after my husband died a year ago, I moved to Arlington, Virginia, to be with my

daughter and her family. That was my daughter driving the car waiting to see if I could get in. She honked when she left and will be back in about an hour.

MRS. HERRITY

I'm glad that worked out. Now, what can I do for ya that has to do with that big decision?

LUCY

I just wanted to be inside this building one more time. Now, I see it's being done over, I guess what they call "restored"?

MRS. HERRITY

You are just in time to see this place before we bring it up to date I am working for two young men who bought it when it was in bad shape, and are now bringing it up to the standards of the 1970's. For a long time, it was a boarding house, and ya know how hard that can be on a buildin'.

LUCY

As a boarder here I knew all the comings and goings of people through that door.

MRS. HERRITY

Of course, ya did. Well, these fellas are planning on bigger rooms, new bathrooms, digging out the basement. They even ordered a built-in entertainment center with the first two floors wired for sound. They're going all the way—if their dough holds out. Soon, ya won't recognize this house from what it was when you lived here.

LUCY

I don't mean to be forward, but isn't it unusual for a woman to be the contractor on a project like this?

MRS. HERRITY

In general, you're right. I've been a contractor, or a "contractrix" as one of the new owners calls me, for some time now. Most of our work is re-doing old buildings for the young people who have jobs downtown and for retirees who want to live in the exciting parts of the District. Some real estate

agents are friends who like my work, and so most of my jobs come from their referrals.

LUCY

Is that how you got this job?

MRS. HERRITY

Yes, and it's hilarious. A friend of mine, who is one of those real estate agents on Capitol Hill, took a liking to these two young guys, and introduced them to me. Then, we find out in our very first conversation that I went to high school in Chicago with the aunt of one of the guys. It was a done deal after that. It's funny how people connect.

LUCY

What a coincidence! Do you find that the workmen get along with you as the boss?

MRS. HERRITY *with a laugh*

Sure, we get along just fine. It took them a while to trust me. I just have to know all the facts, for example, how that new entertainment center

works. I especially have to keep on top of the costs of doing electrical, plumbing, and other jobs. If I don't know all about new gadgets and the cost of everything, I will be eaten up by these guys. There is no pretendin' with them, especially in their eyes when a woman's doin' a man's job.

LUCY

I'm impressed. You did this during times when women found it almost impossible to be owners of their own businesses or otherwise to take "a man's job."

MRS. HERRITY

I'm not easily intimidated. Maybe, it comes from having four brothers and no sisters.

LUCY

That had to help. How does your husband deal with this?

MRS. HERRITY

He actually works with me. I dare not say “for” me. He does a laborer’s job. Right now, Tim and our son are diggin’ out the basement. He’s very helpful.

LUCY

It’s wonderful what you’ve done. Other women should have the same chance.

MRS. HERRITY

Of course, I’m with ya on that.

LUCY

Well, let me tell you a little bit of my story. I lived here for three months, training to be a more effective speaker for women’s rights. The way it goes now, men presume they are the leaders in all aspects of society and the role of women is to produce babies and then to raise them.

MRS. HERTITY

It sounds like you have been involved in this for a while.

LUCY

More than fifty years ago, when I was young, I got excited about the fight to give us the right to vote. My mother took me to march with her in Pittsburgh in the suffragists' parade. Since then, I've argued for the rights of women in our town and in the surrounding areas, even testifying before the state legislature.

MRS. HERRITY

It sounds to me that you've got some gumption.

LUCY

We paid a price. My kids were harassed in school by other students whose parents I had criticized and even by some teachers who thought I had gone too far. In our town of Bristow and in other small towns, the struggle is difficult. When you argue before school boards, city councils and such, you are arguing with your friends and with people you went to school with or who live next door. Then there's the problem of rumor-mongering and gossiping. This can be really biting and draining.

MRS. HERRITY *with a laugh.*

I don't think that gossipin' is limited to small towns. Ya should hear some of the things that are said here about neighbors, friends, and most of all about politicians.

LUCY

Mrs. Herrity, I don't want to presume on you and take up too much of your time. I would just like to look around a little.

MRS. HERRITY

You won't find much upstairs 'cause we've already knocked down most of the walls. The rooms were too small by today's standards. There's also debris all over the place and construction dust on everything. Since it's being dug up, the basement is also a real mess.

LUCY

So, there's no chance to take a look down there?

MRS. HERRITY

No, sorry. Ya would be caked with dust and dirt in no time. Is there something special that you want to see? I can ask my husband to look around for something or to bring it up here to look at.

LUCY

No, no. Thank you for your courtesy. It's probably long gone. I will be satisfied to sit in this room, if you don't mind. So many things happened around this table.

MRS. HERRITY

This time it's me prying a little. What did happen here, especially with your marriage? Why is it still so important to you?

LUCY

Now that my husband is gone, I feel more comfortable talking about it. As I mentioned earlier, those three months I spent here were the time I learned how to speak up better for our rights. It was also the time when I had to decide between staying with my husband or going off with another man.

MRS. HERRITY

Truth be told, my decision about Tim, my husband, was a difficult one. At the time, I was seeing someone else who made me feel good. But, I think I made the right choice.

LUCY

I will gladly tell you how I made my decision. Truth be told, I think it is better that my kids not know everything about those times. But, I would appreciate talking about them with you.

MRS. HERRITY

I know how ya feel. Some things are best left unsaid to kids. And yet, you need someone to be honest with.

LUCY

Thank you. Just being in this room moves me so much. This was our meeting room, our escape from the world.

MRS. HERRITY

It will be fun to hear of your adventures and how you decided which way to go.

LUCY

I did have some fun at the time. Using another name and identity was part of the game for me. My first name is Lucy, but I decided to be known as Trixie during my time in Washington. This was also the time when some men started to use “girlie” in talking to and about their girl friends. “Girlie” was mostly said in an affectionate way, but sometimes it was used as a way to indicate wrong-doing. I learned that names, including nick-names, can mean something.

MRS. HERRITY

I wonder why I was never called “girlie”?

LUCY

Now, let me tell you what happened, right here in this very room. This is a story about pushing a marriage to its limits by a lack of trust in each other.

One day about fifty years ago,—

Scene 2. New Friends

It is the mid-1920s, in the kitchen of the same Capitol Hill row house, a young woman is pouring herself a cup of coffee from the pot on the stove. A large table with chairs around it dominates the room. Another young woman enters the kitchen.

TRIXIE

Oooh, sorry. I didn't know anyone else was up this early.

ELLY

That's all right, hon. We're all equal here. You'se pays your rent, and you'se get the right to a place at the table. That's what we say here. I'm Elly. What's your name, dearie?

TRIXIE

Oh, I'mmm—Trixie.

ELLY

It seems like you had to remember your name. Did I scare you that much?

TRIXIE

Oh, no. No, not at all. It's just that the train from Pennsylvania was late and I didn't get here until 2 am. Now, I woke up at 6 am and can't sleep any longer.

ELLY

Ya don't need to tell me the time ya got here. All of us could hear you coming in and dragging your bags up the stairs. We also could hear the scolding that Mrs. Sweeney gave you for being late.

TRIXIE

I didn't mean to make so much noise. I'm sorry.

ELLY

That's all right, hon. It's Sunday. We can sleep later today.

TRIXIE

Well, as you said, Mrs. Sweeney was a little put out that I was so late. I was supposed to be here by 7 pm.

ELLY

Speaking in a loud voice

Mrs. Sweeney is a wonderful woman.

Then, whispering to Trixie

She can hear everything we say in this kitchen since her bedroom is just down the corridor.

TRIXIE

Smiling that she is being brought in on a secret

Yes, I agree she is wonderful, and I couldn't expect her to carry my bags up to the second floor.

She winks at Elly

ELLY

Of course not, dearie.

Then, whispering again

Or, to do much of anything else around here but to collect the rent after serving us gruel five times a week.

Elly winks at Trixie

TRIXIE

So, Elly, you don't mind me calling you Elly?

ELLY

That's my name, and I'm stickin' with it.

TRIXIE

If you don't mind Elly, where are you from? I'm not trying to be nosey. I'm just interested.

ELLY

I think that is nice. Ya want to talk about someone other than you yourself. It's hard to get the guys to understand that.

TRIXIE

You're telling me! I don't know many gents who wouldn't rather talk about themselves than

anybody else. The next favorite subject is football, baseball, and any other type of sport being played at that time. Of course, the guys are always ready to bring up their fixation with any woman's breasts or "bubs" as they are beginning to call them. Mothers must be breast-feeding their sons too long.

ELLY

Themselves, sports, and pubs—that's about it. At least with my boyfriends.

TRIXIE

Did you grow up in Washington? Are you a local?

ELLY

Do I sound like a rube? No, I'm from New York City. I thought everyone could get that from how I speak. At least, that's what people down here tell me.

TRIXIE

I sorta got that, but I didn't want to presume.

ELLY

That's OK. Five years ago, I came here with a boy friend who thought that we could get good jobs with the government. That didn't work out. It wasn't that easy to get a position. They were cutting back after hiring up during the Great War.

TRIXIE

I read in the newspapers that there were lots of jobs here after the war.

ELLY

There weren't that many at the time we were lookin'. Also, what really hurt us was what people said about Neu York and Neu Yorkers. Many people don't seem to like us very much.

TRIXIE

You have to remember that this area is part of the South and the 'War of Northern Aggression,' as some southerners call it, took place only some 60 years ago.

ELLY

Despite all that, I got a stenographer's job in the Interior Department. Boy friend did not do as well, and so he went home.

TRIXIE

Were you interested in things that the interior group does?

ELLY

I didn't know what "Interior" meant. The only thing I could think of was interior decorating in a house.

She laughs

Good thing for me. I went to the Carnegie Library which had an encyclopedia explaining that this was the part of the government dealing with national parks and Indian tribes. So, in the interview I pretended to know something about that stuff. It was all information I got from the encyclopedia. I bluffed my way through, and I got the job.

TRIXIE

I've heard that New Yorkers are gutsy. I guess that's true.

ELLY

If you had to live with so many people you would become gutsy too. As they say in the Bronx: *J'd hav ta ta survive*. My neighborhood in New York has as many people as live in this burg.

TRIXIE

You mean Washington?

ELLY

Yeah. On Sunday evenings, when I come back by train from a visit in New York, I walk out the front door of Union Station. There's a few people around and a coupala cabs. After being in a real city, DC looks deserted.

TRIXIE

Well, Elly, I'm glad you stayed. Who else lives here at Mrs. Sweeney's?

ELLY

Now that you are here, that makes it even—two guys and two gals. Birch is from North Carolina and

works for something that is called a Bureau or a Table or something police-like. He wears starched white shirts, even in the middle of summer. He says the head guy at work likes the look of a roomful of young men all wearing starched white shirts and black ties.

TRIXIE

I can't say that wouldn't turn me on too. A whole roomful of well-dressed guys. That has sex appeal, as they say in the flicks.

ELLY

How you talk! You are a suffragist and more!

TRIXIE

Well, I am a woman of the 1920s and glad to say good-bye to the past and to the things that women had to do to survive.

ELLY

Well, until you get "pregs," and then you are back to being a servant.

TRIXIE

Oh, please don't be so negative. We got the right to vote law passed a mere six years ago. Now in 1925 we have to fight for other women's rights, like choosing when to be "pregs" as you call it.

ELLY

Boy, Trixie, you belong in D.C. Here, you meet some guy and the first thing he wants to know is what political party do you belong to. What causes are you for? And, this is before he even tries to get a free squeeze!

The kitchen door swings open, and a dapper young man enters, dressed in a starched white shirt and a yellow tie.

ELLY

Birch, you are just in time. We're talkin' about you. It must be Sunday, you're wearing the yellow tie. This is Trixie, our newest boarder. Trixie, Birch and Birch, Trixie.

Birch nods at Trixie and half-smiles, pours himself a cup of coffee, and then sits with good posture at the table across from Trixie.

BIRCH

I'm from North Carolina.

TRIXIE

Yes, Elly was telling me about you.

BIRCH

And, I'm working for Mr. J. Edgar Hoover. Last year, he took over this small government office and is going to use it to restore America to what it was like when our parents were young.

TRIXIE

Swallowing hard and staring right into Birch's eyes.

You mean when women couldn't vote?

BIRCH

Well, I happen to be against that. The Bible says that women are to submit to their husbands, and how can you be sure of that when there's a secret ballot? I think we should have left it the way Jesus wanted it.

TRIXIE

*Almost jumping out of
her chair*

Jesus never said that women shouldn't vote. Where does it say that in the Bible?

BIRCH

Jesus was anointed with oil by women, and Mary Magdalene followed him —even kissing his robes and washing his feet. That shows what role Jesus thought that women should play.

TRIXIE

God almighty!

BIRCH

You shouldn't use the Lord's name in vain. I am going to church and will pray for you.

Birch gets up and slams the kitchen door as he leaves.

ELLY

Slapping the table and smiling broadly

My gosh. That went well, don't you think?

TRIXIE

Trixie shrugs her shoulders, and mumbles

What an idiot.

ELLY

Now that we are finished with Birch, or to be more accurate, he seems to be done with you, let's move on to our fourth boarder.

TRIXIE

Yes, please. And I hope to God he's better than that guy named after a tree, who wants women to kiss his clothes and various parts of his body.

ELLY

You will like Tommie. Count on it. He is our party guy. That explains why he has not come down yet. As he says,

“Early to party and late to bed does not make you healthy, wealthy, or wise, but it sure gives you a big head start on having fun.”

The kitchen door slowly opens. In comes this disheveled over-weight young man speaking with a raspy voice.

TOMMIE

Good morning. Why does God's little helper have to stomp on each stair as he comes up and then stomp more loudly on each step as he goes down? Is God

so deaf he hasn't heard that Birch is on his way to church to condemn those who don't do the same?

ELLY

Tommie, this is our new boarder, Trixie.

TRIXIE

Tommie, good to meet you. I moved in late last night.

TOMMIE

We know. We know. I went to bed early last night, before 2, and heard you and each of your bags as you dragged yourself up the stairs. You have three bags, don't you?

TRIXIE

Why, yes. I do. How could you hear me? Mrs. Sweeney told me that the girls' floor was the second and that the men's floor was the third. And, that each floor had a lock on the door to the stair case.

TOMMIE

Have you ever heard of the phrase “noise carries?”
So, Mrs. Sweeney may have made you safe from our
groping fingers. We, on the other hand, were not
deaf to the dropping, then banging of bag one
coming up the stairs. Then, bag two, and finally, the
dramatic entry of bag three.

TRIXIE

Oh, I am so sorry. I had no idea.

TOMMIE

Well, Trixie, you may not have been sensitive to
others last night; but with that heart-felt apology to
us victims, I declare you for the time being “fit
company.”

ELLY

You certainly are giving the razz to this lady,
Tommie.

*Then shifting her voice to a
whisper, she continues*

And, you know how Mrs. Sweeney feels about us coming down in our PJs. You'd better change clothes before she comes in here.

TOMMIE

I appreciate that advice, Elly; but first I'd like to know more about our new roomer. I'm sure there is more to her than being a "witch" which Birch called you as he went to meet his religious pals.

That caught my interest. Since I've never seen a witch in person, although I have seen a number of women who are that word with a "b," not a "w." I got out of bed early to come take a look.

TRIXIE

I'm a not a "b" or a "w." I am simply fighting for women to be respected. I'm here for a three-month course to become more effective in speaking up for women and to counter Birch's kind.

TOMMIE

I like that phrase: “his kind.” It makes him sound like he’s a type of wild beast from Africa. Well, Elly, it seems we have another political type here.

TRIXIE

I suppose that you can say that because nothing will be done unless we get involved in politics and elections.

TOMMIE

I hope that all this discussion about rights and marches isn’t just another religion. We don’t need a female Birch.

TRIXIE

No, it’s not a religious movement. It’s about human decency—men being respectful to the women in their lives.

TOMMIE

Trixie, it would be mighty decent and respectful of you if you’d go out with us to taste our current fixation--daiquiris.

TRIXIE

I never heard of them, respectfully, I say.

TOMMIE

They are the new giggle water. They go down easy; and then after a few, you realize you're smashed, in a nice way.

TRIXIE

That sounds swell.

TOMMIE

Now, there's another motive for the invitation for daiquiris. Since you are living here at Mrs. Sweeney's, we'd like to get to know you better to see if you would qualify as a decent and respectful member of our bunch.

TRIXIE

Are you making fun of me—decently and respectfully?

TOMMIE

That is a requirement of bunching, one must have a sense of humor.

TRIXIE

I see the point. OK with me.

TOMMIE

Now, to a crucial requirement. To be a member, you you have to meet our standard for daily consumption of alcoholic beverages. We invite you to go out with us this evening so that we can observe first-hand whether you have what it takes.

ELLY

I can assure you, Trixie, that it is a most agreeable test.

TRIXIE

I am up for that, but can I ask something? Are there many speakeasies in this neighborhood? With Prohibition there's no bar or tavern left open in Bristow. Most people want to avoid a fight with their bluenose neighbors and so they just drink at

home. But, from what you say, I presume you are going out to some bars.

TOMMIE

The bars and taverns in most states have closed due to Senator Volstead's constitutional amendment forbidding the consumption of alcohol. Pushing the Act were a bunch of Mrs. Grundys whose husbands passed out before they could do their duties.

ELLY *laughing*

Tommie, how you talk! How do you know all that?

TOMMIE

Elly, don't forget. I work on the Hill, even if it is only part-time showing Iowa's finest citizens the nation's capitol.

ELLY

You're right, Tommie, I had forgotten. How could I have done that—even for a minute?

TOMMIE

As you will recall, I was made a page in the Congress due to the influence of our local congressman. A few years ago —maybe more than a few,— I graduated from the Capitol Hill page school.

TRIXIE

Didn't your parents want you to come home?

TOMMIE

Well, yes and no. Yes, as a son; and no, because I had developed different ideas than those of the average citizen of Iowa City, Iowa. Also, I have six brothers and sisters. My parents have enough other lives to mess up and don't need mine. I go to Iowa only for short visits now and again.

ELLY

We, your friends, are happy about your staying here.

TOMMIE

I love this politics stuff and just living near the Capitol gives me goosebumps. So, Elly and Trixie,

that was a long route to get to an answer to the question of how do I know why laws were passed?

I have friends who work all over the Hill in congressmen's and senators' offices. As soon as their congressman or senator gets on that train to go home, they are in the Green Door. Then, after one or two libations, they pop out stories of what gets done and why it happens.

TRIXIE

Is the Green Door a speakeasy near the Capitol?

TOMMIE

Our Women's Protector is fast with her reasoning. Yes, Trixie, it's a famous one right next to the congressional buildings, and especially favored by elected officials. The owner is known to be very well-connected under all presidents and political parties.

TRIXIE

Wow, this is fun getting the inside dope. I appreciate your being so patient in explaining things to me.

TOMMIE

Elly, this woman is swell. I approve of her as a possible member of the bunch. And, now I shall say goodbye before I upset our landlady with my PJs. See you guys later for drinks.

Tommie exits

ELLY

Trixie, do you want to use our bathroom first, or should I go? I only need about 15 minutes.

TRIXIE

You've been swell to me. Why don't you go ahead?

ELLY

Okay, kiddo. See ya soon, and welcome aboard.

Elly leaves, and Trixie talks to herself.

TRIXIE

Gosh, I like these people. While my husband drinks his favorite fancy French wines, I'm going to have a good time drinking daiquiris with my new friends. I have to decide how much to tell them about my secret.

Scene 3. Marriages

Early the next morning, Trixie pours herself a cup of coffee and begins to inspect the cabinets, the sink, the stove, and the new fridge which is to take the place of the ice box. She shrugs her shoulders, not too impressed. Mrs. Sweeney is standing in the doorway watching her.

MRS. SWEENEY

I see you're a curious one, some might even say nose-y. Find anything ya didn't like?

TRIXIE

No, no. Not at all. I was merely interested—no, I don't mean curious like you said—more like I'm impressed that you cook dinner five nights a week for your four roomers and yourself with only this amount of space and these utensils. I was also impressed that you had a refrigerator.

MRS. SWEENEY

We did pretty well before Mr. Sweeney's illness and death five years ago, I used to cook for us and often for pals of his who were on the outs with their wives or just not settled in. He was a generous man--that is, he freely gave of my time and work.

TRIXIE

It certainly seems that he was swell.

MRS. SWEENEY

He made good money. He worked over on 14th Street in the streetcar barn. He repaired the cars. But then, he got sick and was sick for such a long time. Well. The result was that he didn't leave me much. I didn't have enough to pay the mortgage. So,

it was, either turn the house over to the bank or take boarders.

TRIXIE

I'm so sorry to hear of all that. It must have been hard on you.

MRS. SWEENEY

Well, I made my way somehow. Now, tell me more about yourself, more than was in that letter you sent me for the lodging.

TRIXIE

I'm from a small town, Bristow, sort'a halfway between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, the state capital.

MRS. SWEENEY

Sorry, I'm from southern Maryland, and I'm not too good on geography.

TRIXIE

Well, let me see if I can help by telling you what New Yorkers say about the state. "Pennsylvania has

a piece of New York at either end with Alabama in-between.”

MRS. SWEENEY

You mean it’s all Southerners in the middle, with Philadelphia and Pittsburg at the ends?

TRIXIE

Well, not exactly “Southerners” but people of the same beliefs, such as in their “you’d better go to church” attitude, their flag-waving, and especially how poorly they treat women.

MRS. SWEENEY

Well, I don’t know about all that, hon, but what does that have to do with this three-month course you’re taking. Is this to give ya tips on catchin’ a man?

TRIXIE

No, definitely not that. The purpose is to help women to speak up for their rights, and we sure need that. In Pennsylvania, my boy friends were of

the same mind—the man’s in charge. That’s it. No further explanation or discussion needed.

MRS. SWEENEY

Poor luck with men, dearie, you’re not alone. Mr. Sweeney would go to the tavern every darned day after work. After he had a few beers, he’d call me before leaving the bar to tell me he was on his way home—and that he was bringing two or three of his drunken pals who had to be fed. Can you imagine that? It’s like I was runnin’ a restaurant.

TRIXIE

Why did you put up with that?

MRS. SWEENEY

I’m all for you trying to change men, but I doubt that it can be done.

TRIXIE

Our groups have done surveys and all. We have evidence that the country would be better off if women had their rights.

MRS. SWEENEY

I tried that way, using facts to make the argument. I told Mr. Sweeney that we were using up all our funds with his drinkin' and feedin' his pals and showed him all the dollars and cents. It made no difference. And, the icing on the cake was that a lot of these so-called "pals" didn't even show up at his wake or funeral Mass.

TRIXIE

I'm sorry. I wish I could help in some way.

MRS. SWEENEY

Well, you can, dearie. Give me some gossip. I love hearing about people. Did I hear it right that you're goin' to get invitations to embassy parties because of this women's rights group? Is there a party every night? Won't you get tired after a while?

TRIXIE

So, you can hear what is said in the kitchen.

MRS. SWEENEY

Oh no, you must have told me that two nights ago when ya came in.

TRIXIE

The only thing I said was that I was sorry for being so late. You said the rest, and quite forcefully.

MRS. SWEENEY

Leave that aside. Do you have a nice young man back home, even in light of what you said about the men up there? We all have to compromise if we get serious about someone. From our first date, I knew Sweeney was a drunk. Because of demon rum's hold on him, I couldn't trust him.

Despite that, I didn't want to be an old maid, so I married him. Then, after he died, I couldn't find anyone else. I didn't want to be alone, and now I am, an old widow.

TRIXIE

To answer your question—there are some young men around back home, but I don't think they're anything special.

MRS. SWEENEY

Getting up to leave

Well, dearie, since you aren't going to tell me much at this point, my advice to you is have all the fun you can while you're down here.

TRIXIE

I am going to do my best.

Mrs. Sweeney leaves the kitchen while Trixie looks off into space as if she was remembering something. She talks aloud to herself.

TRIXIE

Oh, how I remember that same fear of being alone and needing to marry someone who was at least decent.

Elly enters

ELLY

Well, good morning, young lady.

TRIXIE

Good morning, Elly, did you have a good night's sleep?

ELLY

The usual—good until about three a.m., and then I was restless the rest of the night. What about you? Did meeting Birch and Tommie upset your sleep?

TRIXIE

No, not at all. They are characters though, each in his own manner.

Up in Penn, I've had to put up with worse than Birch. They call us flappers like we're not intelligent enough to know how to vote.

Tommie is a party guy like more than a few in my high school class. They forgot they were supposed to learn something to be awarded that high school diploma and then to get a decent job. Now, several of them hang out at the train station drinking the

hough they buy from the town's bootlegger. At least, Tommie has a job.

ELLY

Tommie's a lot of fun. He makes life bearable around here. The only thing that I don't understand is that he never has a serious girl friend, just drinking buddies.

TRIXIE

Well, everyone is different. Maybe, he 's like some of the guys who don't marry until they are in the forties or later.

ELLY

That's depressing!

TRIXIE

I don't want you to get the blues over that. So, let me ask another question.

ELLY

Shoot.

TRIXIE

I'm for women's rights and all; but, I don't like walking into a bar by myself. I also like a man opening the door for me, and pulling the chair out for me to sit down in a restaurant.

Does your bunch include polite guys like that? For instance, the group that runs our training sessions says that participants usually get invited to embassy receptions and other formal parties. Do you have guys who could come with me to bars and parties?

ELLY

You mean you want a gigolo. Tommie would love to hear that we got one hot property here.

TRIXIE

No, no. Not a gigolo, just a companion for parties and bar hopping.

ELLY

Well, that's a shame. Being a gigolo could be interesting. But, sure, we got lots of the District's

most outstanding young men who are available when duty calls.

TRIXIE

That's good to know. Before you came down here, I was chatting with Mrs. Sweeney. We were talking about her having to turn her home into a boarding house. You feel sorry for her with her husband using up their savings with his reckless behavior and then his illness.

ELLY

It's sad, but she's a fighter, and has made another life for herself. She's strong.

TRIXIE

Yes indeed. Elly, I've only known you for coupala hours; but, I feel I can trust you. Can I tell you something that you won't tell a soul?

ELLY

I promise you. Never will I tell anyone what you tell me in confidence. It'll be like a confession to a

priest. He can't, even in court, pass on what he's been told in confession. At least, that is what Mrs. Sweeney says.

TRIXIE

Elly, I'm married. Two nights ago when I arrived here on a late train, it was because my husband and I had been arguing. That led to me missing my train. He was in the process of leaving for a three-month business trip to Europe, and he refused to let me go with him.

ELLY

I sorta figured you were married. I don't know. It's how you say certain things. And, last night at the bar I didn't buy that line you gave everyone that you were single because you hadn't found the right guy. Someone as attractive as you is snatched up early.

TRIXIE

I hope that no one else is as smart as you.

ELLY

Besides me, Tommie had figured it out. We didn't want to embarrass you by asking directly. So, we kept it to ourselves, and defended you from other people.

TRIXIE

Elly, thanks. Both to you and Tommie.

ELLY

Now I see your reason for being here. You're in Washington for three months because your husband is gone for the same period—without you.

TRIXIE

You got it, girlie. The cat goes off to play, why shouldn't the mouse feel this is her chance too.

ELLY

You are playing cat and mouse games?

TWIXIE

I see it more as tit for tat. Fred, my husband, goes off to Paris for three months, and I'm left alone. Am

I supposed to sit there for 90 days praying for his safe travels?

ELLY

Let's see. What does the marriage vow say? Is it something like "in sickness and in health, until death do we part"?

TRIXIE

That's what I mean. We weren't sick or dying but we shouldn't be apart. I'm glad that you remembered that. I wanted to go to Europe too, and he said no and went alone. That puts us apart.

ELLY

My head is gettin' dizzy. Is it to be apart physically that's to be avoided? Or, is it that you have to be spiritually together always? Let's leave it at that.

TRIXIE

When I told Fred I was going to Washington, D.C. to work with the National Women's Party, he said that I couldn't do that. That group was just a bunch of

flappers. They won once with getting the right to vote, and now in his view, they want it all.

ELLY

Trixie, tell Fred he's right. We want it all, including his pants. So we can be the ones who run the house.

TRIXIE

Don't tease. He will believe you. He's not totally against women's rights. At the last minute, he endorsed a woman's right to vote.

ELLY

Well, that must have made you happy.

TRIXIE

It did. That's Fred's way. He's very cautious, and likes to know what direction the wind is blowing, before he reveals his position.

ELLY

Well, that's not so bad.

TRIXIE

You're right. It isn't. Being so serious makes Fred one of the most respected leaders in our town. Therefore, as his wife, I get financial stability and a nice social position.

ELLY

What's not to like about that?

TRIXIE

Even better, his position gives me the freedom to speak up for women. That's ironic, isn't it?

ELLY

So, the position he's got in town makes it easier for you to be who you are.

TRIXIE

I guess. I'm learning that as long as I don't push it too far, it's OK.

ELLY

That's what you'll have to decide—what is too far when it comes to something that really matters to you.

TRIXIE

I know, and I'm lucky that I am close to my mother. I have someone to talk to about this.

ELLY

That's wonderful that you have her. What does she think?

TRIXIE

My mother is a suffragist too. So, that makes it easier. But, she is also very practical. When Fred asked me to marry him, I told my mom that he was against women's rights, as well as being 15 years older than me. I also did not notice any passion in him. His necking and such were sorta cold and forced.

ELLY

What did dear old ma say to that.

TRIXIE

She said that I wasn't going to get everything I wanted in one person. She urged me to consider what I really needed, and then overlook the rest.

ELLY

That sounds like the voice of experience.

TRIXIE

At first, I was surprised at her advice. Then, the more I thought of it, the more it made sense.

ELLY

Well, you married him. So. I presume you decided that Fred's characteristics were mostly to the good.

TRIXIE

I tried to see things from his perspective. He has the most highly regarded law firm in town, and keeps a close eye on the revenues that come in. He's respected as one of the leading men in the area. This wasn't handed to him. He worked hard to get to where he is. I respect him for that.

ELLY

So, you gave up passion for stability, for security.

TRIXIE

I guess you could say that. However, now we have a problem because he thought that I would drop my causes once married—and I have not. He actually told me that he thought women would be satisfied once they could vote and then life would go on as before.

ELLY

I presume that you're now speaking up for a woman's right to divorce, birth control, and inheritance.

TRIXIE

That's right. Those topics are right on target. Fred contends that his law firm is beginning to suffer because of my involvement with them. The men in town, and some women, don't see the need to mess around with those areas. Leave well enough alone, they say.

ELLY

Yes, because that's where the problems are. In effect, a wife can't divorce if her husband opposes that. Women can't stop pregnancies even for good reasons. Women also face problems inheriting property what rightfully ought to be theirs.

TRIXIE

I tried to make myself less visible about these issues, to be behind the scene. But, reporters called a few times and I had to be honest about what I thought. And, that has resulted in a rocky situation with Fred.

ELLY

What do you mean?

TRIXIE

Well, prior to this, Fred would make some reference to the women's campaign and would ask me why I had to be so involved. Now, he's more specific. Before he left for Europe, Fred told me that my views were beginning to affect the law firm's

revenues. Some clients were talking about leaving the firm and going elsewhere.

His exact words were: “Girlie, you’re not helping the situation by being so prominent in pushing for ‘women’s rights.’ We can’t go on like this.”

ELLY

What’s that supposed to mean?

TRIXIE

He doesn’t trust me any more not to go over the line. I don’t believe any more that he will stick with me through thick and thin. We don’t believe in one another.

Trust is like the cement that holds together a brick wall. A marriage crumbles without it.

ELLY

Is your marriage really in that much trouble, or was it just Fred venting his anger?

TRIXIE

I don't know and that's what bothers me. Fred and I get along on nearly everything else, even down to the way we like to decorate the house and the style of clothes to wear. It's just this women's rights issue where we go separate ways.

ELLY

It seems to me that issue is what you care about the most, isn't it?

TRIXIE

That's the problem. I do care deeply. So, how do you compromise on things you care the most about?

ELLY

If I were smart enough to have the answer to that question, I'd have a boy friend by now.

TRIXIE

I'm hoping for the best when Fred returns. He is in Paris where we spent our honeymoon. To me, Paris must be the prettiest city in the world. Maybe, it will cool him down.

ELLY

I so wish that I could visit there.

TRXIE

I hope that you get your chance. You deserve it. Fred gave me my chance, and I don't want to sound like a disgruntled wife. I am very aware that I am not in a bad situation. Just look at Mrs. Sweeney. She married a drunk, met his demands for socializing his buddies, and then almost lost her house. I'm in the gravy compared to that.

ELLY

From a single person's point of view, marriage seems like a lot of work.

TRIXIE

You can say that again. Now, my job—in addition to my training—is to see if I can meet the bunch's rule for minimum daily consumption of alcoholic beverages.

ELLY.

You're right. We meet here at 5 this afternoon for some libations.

TRIXIE

Maybe tonight, I will meet a handsome, passionate, rich young man who favors women's rights. I feel lucky.

ELLY

Aren't you a married woman?

TRIXIE

That doesn't mean I can't fantasize.

They exit the stage.

Act II

Scene 1. Carl

Nearly three months have passed. It is now precisely a week before Christmas. Thursday late afternoon in the kitchen at the table, Tommie and Carl are having a beer.

TOMMIE

It sure is nice that you gov'ment guys can take off early so we can get started on our celebrating.

CARL

I'm fillin' in for our branch chief who took two weeks off as vacation leave. Ya know the gover'ment policy on vacation days is that they expire on December 31. So, you have to use them during the year

TOMMIE

I'm happy that our tax dollars are being used so efficiently. It's nice too that Mrs. Sweeney let's the "bunch" meet here for a few drinks. Though, it helps that we give her some beers every now and again.

CARL

She's a nice lady, and treats us like we are her children.

TOMMIE

Yeah. Carl, now that I have a chance to talk to you without the whole bunch being here, I have coupala things to ask you.

CARL

Shoot, Tommie. I've got no secrets.

TOMMIE

I know that you are an easy-going guy and that you don't let little things bother you. But, I never realized you faced big challenges during the Great War and came back as a hero.

CARL

Heck, not that again.

TOMMIE

Carl, during the years I've known you, you never told me that you were a war hero.

CARL.

Shucks. Who's been spreadin' rumors about that? When the guys at work at the Ag. Department bring it up, I tell them not to believe everything they hear.

TOMMIE

During the last coupala weeks, several folks have told me you were a courageous fighter in Europe.

CARL

Oh, the reason they're saying that is 'cause our local paper had an article on what's changed five years after the end of the war, and it says something about my time in Europe.

TOMMIE

So, you were a war hero?

CARL

That's not tellin' the whole truth. Don't go tellin' this stuff to Trixie and Elly. They'll die laughin'.

TOMMIE

And, what is the truth? Are you being modest?

CARL

Let me explain. I left high school after three years because it was so borin'. What kinda algebra can help a farmer? So, I was workin' on our farm when the recruiters came to our town and urged the young guys to sign up with the U.S. Army. They were sure good at makin' it look like an adventure, while telling' us that signing' up was our patriotic duty.

The other thing that pushed me toward goin' was my parents were thinkin' of sellin' the farm.

TOMMIE

You were a prize catch for the military. A strong young man without obligations like a wife and family. That's what they wanted.

CARL

I signed the papers, and before you could say "Abe Lincoln ," I was sent to a trainin' base in New Jersey. A newspaper reporter from the Daily Press in Monroe, our neighborin' town, tracked me down and asked me about how I felt goin' to war.

TOMMIE

That's a heck of a good question.

CARL

I was a little nervous about talkin' to him. I told him that I was just a farm boy from Maryland and didn't know much.

TOMMIE

That's putting yourself down.

CARL

If I had anything to say about it, I wanted us to go to Europe, do our job, and come home.

TOMMIE

Carl, that's a darn good answer.

CARL

Newspapers in our area printed what I said. Folks liked it. They told my mother and father how happy they were to see me in the papers. There was even a photo of me.

TOMMIE

How exciting!

CARL

This is when I got embarrassed. When I came home, I was greeted by the mayor and our neighbors like I was some kinda old time warrior!. They even had a parade in my honor.

What really happened in France was that we were given an area to patrol where the fightin' was over. The Germans were defeated and left. Then, the army gave my platoon medals for preventing any new fightin'. I wasn't any hero. I didn't once aim my rifle at an enemy soldier.

TOMMIE

Did you explain that to people?

CARL

I tried to, but all they wanted was a hero like those they had seen in the papers during the war.

TOMMIE

Carl, you're an honest man.

CARL

Tommie, if I am such a man, I should tell you about Trixie and our plans.

TOMMIE

YES-S?

CARL

We are goin' to get married.

TOMMIE

Has Trixie agreed to this?

CARL

Well, to be truthful, she said there were a few things that needed to be sorted out first before we could really get serious about it.

TOMMIE

Congratulations—tentatively! You two would make a lovely couple. Did Trixie tell you what those obstacles might be?

CARL

No. This is happenin' so fast because she is going back to Pennsylvania in a few days. I've been in love with her from the time we first met about three months ago, but I hesitated to tell her because she is so pretty and fun to be with. I was afraid she would laugh and reject me.

TOMMIE

Carl, you yourself are a catch for any woman.

CARL

That's nice of you to say, Tommie. Anyway, I didn't get the courage to tell her about my love until a few days ago. She then told me she had strong feelings for me. We have spent the last few days together takin' long walks gettin' to know one another better.

TOMMIE

In the last three months, I've seen your relationship go from acquaintances to being thought of as a couple. Now it's always Trixie and Carl or Carl and Trixie.

CARL

As Trixie and I have gotten to know one another, we've come to realize we were made for each other.

TOMMIE

Carl, I hate to be a wet blanket, but I don't want either of you to be hurt or disappointed. You might want to get clear with Trixie about what those problems might be. Anyway, I hope that it all works out. My congratulations to both of you.

Carl looks surprised and confused. Tommie slaps him on the back as they leave.

Scene 2. Infatuation

The next day is Friday, and in the evening, Trixie and Elly are talking while sipping their coffee in the kitchen.

TRIXIE

Elly, I think I'm falling in love.

ELLY

Okaaay. What are the symptoms?

TRIXIE

I can't stop thinking about him. When I have a dream about him, I rerun the dream as slowly as I can to enjoy it a second time. Most mornings, I can't get his face out of my mind. When the afternoon lecturers go on and on, I daydream about walking with him through the woods. After work, when I see him walking toward me, I marvel at his good looks.

ELLY

Glirlie, you got it bad. I presume that the guy involved is not your lawfully wedded husband.

TRIXIE

Of course not. Fred never moved anyone like that. Elly, I swear to you that I never intended to fall in love with anyone during my three months here. And these are the strongest emotions I have ever felt for anyone.

ELLY

So, your game of “pretend,” has gone too far?

TRIXIE

Elly, what am I going to do?

ELLY

Let me guess. His name is Carl, isn't it?

TRIXIE

Of course, you've been with us a lot. What is different for me is how strongly I feel this.

ELLY

Your emotions have taken over. Have you tried to be rational? Like, have you given any thought to what you do next? It's been obvious to everyone for some time that Carl is head over heels in love with you. He'll do whatever you want him to do.

TRIXIE

I've never asked him for anything unusual. In spite of that, he sends me flowers, candies, and birds.

ELLY

Birds? Where have you been hiding those birds? We have seen the flowers and the candy, but no birds. I would know since my bedroom is next to yours.

TRIXIE

On that one, I caught him before he picked up the birds at the store. And, told him “no” in strong terms. He still says he is going to do it some day when I am more accepting.

ELLY

I presume that the other things—candy and flowers—were the ones we saw around the house.

TRIXIE

They were from him. He’s very considerate and thoughtful. He doesn’t get all wrapped up in nonsense stuff. He tries to focus on the most important things. I guess he considers me one of those more important things.

ELLY

Mrs. Sweeney, the two guys and me have talked about how sweet he is on you.

TRIXIE

He's the most considerate man I've ever met. I haven't found too many good-looking men who think of others.

ELLY

By the way, you should know that in the last few days Carl's been going around telling everyone that you are his "girlie."

TRIXIE

I would prefer that he wait on that until we see if things can be worked out. I can understand why he's doing this. We both feel we're made for one another.

ELLY

We girls have talked about him as you can imagine, and we came down to two possibilities. One, he

missed the Boy Scouts' classes on "How to Act as a Man," with lessons such as belching and farting at the same time. Or, second, he is mentally challenged in a nice way, like the grossness part of his brain doesn't work.

TRIXIE

You girls. You are infatuated with him almost as much as me.

ELLY

Let me be honest with you. Carl is very nice but he acts a little slow. He often has trouble picking up on what is said.

TRIXIE

He stuttered when he was young. Now, he waits before he replies to someone because he is trying to think of easy words to use to avoid that stuttering.

He struggles with this all the time. Most people don't notice or think he is not too smart.

ELLY

I didn't know that about his fear of stuttering. I'm sorry to hear about it. Well, he's such a hunk that it is easy to overlook one minor flaw.

TRIXIE

Elly, you've gotta help me. How can we make it work for Carl and me? What's going through my head are more and more questions. Am I mostly attracted to Carl for the loving? Will that wear off over the years? Is he ambitious enough to provide a decent living? Would Fred ever agree to support a divorce? Should I run off with Carl to Nevada and get divorced and re-married?

ELLY

Boy, with all those questions your head must be spinning.

TRIXIE

Carl and I have talked about this a lot in the last few days. Other questions are popping up, such as would Fred cut off all access to money that I have

since he is on every account? Would he sue us on whatever grounds to bog us down financially?

ELLY

You're asking all the right questions but only a lawyer can answer some of the biggest ones.

TRIXIE

I agree, but I can't get these questions out of my head. Could I be prosecuted for adultery, if I get too close to Carl and Fred gets his pal in the Commonwealth Attorney's office to look into this? Will Fred ever change his opinions on women's rights? Does love overcome fears of insecurity?

ELLY

YIPPEES! What does Carl say to all that?

TRIXIE

Carl says his love will never die, that it will only grow. He says that he might be named chief of his unit in the government, and that will mean a nice raise.

ELLY

That helps to answer some of the questions.

TRIXIE

I don't know. I am so confused, and can't decide what to do. One minute I am ready to drive to Nevada, and the next minute I want to flee back to my security in Pennsylvania.

ELLY

And, the real final answer is?

TRIXIE

When I opt for Carl as the answer, I get jittery with fears of financial and social disaster. I enjoy the good life. I don't have to worry about money. Not everyone agrees with my positions on women's rights, but I am respected as Fred's wife in our little town's society.

ELLY

You would be giving up a lot. Let's go have a good strong drink with dinner. That will help.

TRIXIE

Maybe, it will help me by pretending to be in Carl's bed tonight.

ELLY

There are far worse places to pretend to be. Just the thought of it makes me breathe hard. Let's get out of here and try to catch up with the bunch. We will have lots to talk about during the week-end.

They exit.

Scene 3. Do You or Don't You?

Three days later, Monday before Christmas, Carl and Trixie are sitting at the kitchen table. As he talks, he tries to hold Trixie's hands in his, but each time she gently pulls away.

CARL

Girlie, I cannot realize that you are married after this time that I have known you.

TRIXIE

It may seem much longer, but we've only known each other for three months.

CARL

Do not think for one minute that I am mad with you for deceivin' me. To tell the truth, yesterday when ya told me, I was mad; but after I thought it over, ya did exactly right 'cause fellows do get pretty fresh with a girl if they know that they are married.

TRIXIE

I tried to tell you earlier last week by hinting at certain things, but I guess I was too subtle. To tell the truth, maybe I didn't want this to end right away.

CARL

But I never even thought for once that you were married. That is the reason that I was always telling'

you not to go out with Elly because Lug told me that she's not fit company for you.

TRIXIE

Lug is wrong about Elly. She is swell.

CARL

Girlie, I was awful disappointed because you did not have dinner with me Saturday as we had planned; but I suppose ya did what you thought best.

TRIXIE

Saturday during the day I was all mixed up. I finally decided I couldn't see you. That every time I saw you the decision I had just made went out the window. I asked Lug to tell you I couldn't make it, but he missed you.

CARL

Sunday, after you called me in the evening, it seemed to me that all the joy was taken out of life and me too. I had set my heart on seeing' ya.

TRIXIE

Carl, I was a mess all week-end. By Sunday evening I decided that I had to tell you the truth—that I was married. It took me the weekend to get enough courage to make the call.

CARL

Good Lord, it must be great to have a wonderful girl like you, to share love. Are you really attached to him that much? God knows I only wish it was me.

TRIXIE

When you ask “am I really attached to him,” my answer is that it is almost impossible to get a divorce in Pennsylvania.

Also, my husband controls my finances. He writes checks for me, and acts like a guardian of my assets as if I were an infant.

My church strongly opposes divorce. So, my mother will probably not talk to me if I get a divorce in Nevada. I would also be shunned by the people in our town. So, yes, I am attached to him, her, it, and them whether I want to be or not.

CARL

I hadn't thought of it that way. We'll move to another state, maybe California. One of my buddies moved there, changed his name, and became a new person. We are young. We can make a new start.

TRIXIE

That sounds like a dream come true, but it's only a fiction. Carl, I can't get you out of my mind. I'm attracted to you more than I've been to anyone in my whole life, but how can we overcome all these obstacles facing us?

CARL

Let's just elope.

TRIXI

That's what my heart tells me to do, but then I start to worry about the future.

CARL

You're thinking too much. Just let it go.

TRIXIE

Carl, it's not that easy. The last three months have shown me that I miss Fred, despite his stuffiness and political bragging. He's my anchor. I feel comfortable with him. I can't just brush that aside. Fred and I certainly don't have a passionate relationship, rather I have an affection for him. There are different kinds of love, I am learning.

CARL

You're telling me that in a choice between a man who loves ya so much that he would give his life for you and a man who has affection for you, that ya would choose the cold fish?

Carl lowers his head.

Then, he says softly:

I cana believe that is your decision.

TRIXIE

Trying to change the subject, Trixie says:

The bunch had a party last night, with plenty of food and drink, according to Elly. But I stayed home because I did not want to run into you.

CARL

*Speaking almost in a
whisper and then getting
louder and more frantic:*

I went there to see you, but Elly told me that you were not feelin' well. That knocked the kick out of it for me. I told the bunch I was going home. They all gave me the razz.

TRIXIE

I'm sorry, I ruined it for you.

CARL

I got a letter from my mother. She was terrible disappointed because I did not go home for her birthday. It was the first year I did not go home to see her; and I gave it up for you because you wanted to go out Saturday night for dinner.

TRIXIE

I didn't know it was her birthday.

CARL

Lug said that he saw you Saturday, and he told me you looked swell. You always looked good to me, Honey, but I know you think I am always kiddin' you when I tell you so.

TRIXIE

You always say nice things about me, and I appreciate that. My husband criticizes me more than he praises me. Your positive approach makes a difference in how people feel.

CARL

You told me to send the watch I got you to mother but I will not do it. I got it for you and nobody else is going to get it but you. Girlie, I am not going to take it back like I did the pearls.

TRIXIE

This is sweet, but don't spend all your money on me.

CARL

I'm going to send you a plant, the kind you like so well. You can think of me when you look at it and remember our times together.

TRIXIE

I will think of you more often than that.

CARL

Before you leave, we—meaning just you and me—have to have one more little party for a farewell. I gotta see you alone once more before you leave. For God's sake don't refuse me.

TRIXIE

I don't think that that is such a good idea.

CARL

I know how much affection you have for him. Can't you realize I care that much for you. You know I love you dearly and will do anything to make you happy.

He slams his fist on the table and shouts.

Why in the name of God do people marry when they are mismatched and their love is only wasted?

TRIXIE

Carl, it would be a dream come true to marry you, but I can't see a clear path for us to do that. Other girls will see in you the kindness and respect for all that I see.

CARL

"Another girl will come along," is what they always tell me. I want you to get that canary bird. I will pay for it, just tell me when.

TRIXIE

Please don't do that.

CARL

One last party. That's all I ask. Please don't disappoint me this time like you did last Saturday. You look like you are set on leavin'. So, this would be the last chance to see ya. I cannot bear to give ya up.

TRIXIE

OK. One last time.

CARL

I suppose you think I 'm crazy and you will only laugh at this. For God's sake, don't. If you could only love me like you do him. You're too good and a true woman to waste your life on him. Girlie, you will always have my love.

Carl gets up, kisses her hard and lovingly on the mouth, and rushes out. Trixie looks drained.

TRIXIE

Darn him. Every time I see him I get all stirred up. Is he right? Am I throwing love away for a few dollars? God, I'm confused again.

Scene 4. The Christmas Season.

*It is December 22, three days before Christmas.
Trixie, Elly, and Tommie have the holiday spirit.*

TOMMIE

I love this time of year. You don't have to apologize to anyone for drinkin' too much. "It's Christmas time" is the right answer to any question. Who can disagree with that?

TRIXIE

Tommie, in my three months here I've never seen anyone who could stop you from partying, regardless of the month. Y'ur the master of party-time.

TOMMIE

Well, you certainly shook off your attitude that you had all the answers when you first appeared here 80 days ago. We thought a professor of politics had moved in.

TRIXIE

I have to thank you Tommie for including me in your bunch, and it's political science, not politics.

TOMMIE

Politics, schmalotics. It is all the same. Fat-ass men spouting off in public because their wives want them out'a the house.

*As Tommie is speaking,
Birch enters the room
dressed in his white
starched shirt and with a
red tie.*

*Over-hearing Tommie's loud
voice, Birch says:*

BIRCH

That's not true about my boss, Mr. Hoover. His speeches are swell. He is reminding us about morals and discipline.

TRIXIE

I see you have a red tie on. That's nice that you are acknowledging the season.

TOMMIE

It's the blood of the communists, socialists, and other lefties that J. Edgar has caught.

BIRCH

I choose to ignore that last slam. The big reason I'm here today is to wish you well Trixie. I was reminded by Mrs. Sweeney that your time here is almost up.

TRIXIE

That's right. The 3-months end officially on December 31, but they know that nothing gets done around Christmas and New Year's so I can leave any time after Christmas Eve.

ELLY

I've gotten used to having you around. I hope everything goes well up there and that you come back.

TRIXIE

I feel comfortable with you guys too. I've been gone so long from Bristow that I have to get back there to check on things.

TOMMIE

We hope that "checking on things" doesn't take so long you forget us.

ELLY

You certainly have shown that you can keep up with us in partying. We were about to make you a lifetime member of the bunch.

TRIXIE

For years, I wanted to make our town a model for the nation in honoring women's rights. I've got to think through whether that is what I want to dedicate my life to.

TOMMIE

That sounds noble, but do you want to become Saint Trixie of Bistow? Remember, they burned Joan of Arc at the stake as a witch, and then a coupala

hundred years later decided she was not a witch after all, but a saint.

BIRCH

That reminds me, Trixie. I never meant to call you a witch. That just sputtered out of me. You're too liberal, but regardless of your silly—and unpatriotic—views, you are nice.

TRIXIE

Well, thank you Birch, and I was going to take back calling you an idiot, but the longer you went on just now, the more you convinced me that I was right the first time. I will, though, take back what I said about you being named after a tree in North Carolina. Sorry, that's the most I can do.

BIRCH

I think I was. My father told me that my mother was lying in bed with me, her new born, looking out the window. She saw a tree. She thought it was a birch tree. So, she wanted that name for me. It really was a scrub pine, but no matter.

ELLY

She probably wasn't used to the drugs that those hospitals give women. I'll bet you were the first person in your family who wasn't delivered at home.

BIRCH

You're right. I was.

TRIXIE

Birch, thank you for saying some nice things about me.

TOMMIE

We should be goin'. We had our liquid lunch, now it is time for cocktails and dinner at Winnie's. So, gals and guys let's be off. It's our duty to march on.

ELLY

You too, Scrub Pine. Why won't you join us? It's Christmas time.

TOMMIE

Com'on, churchman, join us in fellowship. Isn't that what you call gossiping while sitting around after Sunday service? Gossiping but trying to make it seem like you are really interested in the people being talked about. And, the subjects of the gossiping are either people who aren't there or people who can't hear well. Right?

BIRCH

I will forgive you for disparaging church-goers because it's Christmas. Only time for one beer, then I'll have to leave.

ELLY

Why don't you guys go on, and Trixie and I will catch up with you.

Tommie and Birch walk out of the kitchen, leaving Trixie and Elly.

ELLY

Trixie, we haven't talked much in the last few days. What's going on? Carl is going to be at the party

tonight. How are things with you and him since last week? I'm sorry if I seem to be prying but you haven't come to dinner the last coupala days, and aren't around after dinner. A coupala nights I heard you come in real late.

TRIXIE

I'm still trying to figure this out. I met with Carl and told him I'm staying with Fred. Then, he got me sll confused again.

ELL

Does that mean that you are going with Carl and will try to get a divorce from Fred? Carl and you just need to work out the details of how to do it?

TRIXIE

No, not at all. I'm still trying to decide between them. Should I stay with Fred or go with Carl?

ELLY

What if I were to say "Time is up. You have to decide."

TRIXIE

I don't know where I am. My heart tells me one thing and my brain the opposite.

ELLY

Let me guess. Your heart says Carl and your head says Fred.

TRIXIE

You got it. Is it as obvious as that?

ELLY

Boy, oh boy. How are ya going to handle things tonight?

TRIXIE

I will say I am leaving because I have been gone so long from home and have to check on things back home. I have not decided yet on whether or when to come back to DC.

I have not told anyone, but I can tell you that Fred will be back. Maybe when he is back, I can sort this all out.

ELLY

Rumors are that last week you and Carl were at several parties where he was more “hands’ on” with you than before. I presume everything is going as ya wanted?

TRIXIE

Again, I think so. We are having our last dinner tomorrow night. Carl wanted it that way.

Elly *shakes her head*

Tomorrow night? Oh, boy! Oh boy!

Scene 5. A resolution.

After the bunch leaves for the next party, Mrs. Sweeney is heard talking as she comes through the kitchen doorway.

MRS. SWEENEY

I told you, we don’t have anyone here by the name of Lucy. You must have the wrong address.

FRED MYERS

I know this is the place. Several people in Bristow told my secretary they sent Lucy letters and packages at this address in DC.

MRS. SWEENEY

I can tell you that no Lucy has been sent anything here. I do know that sometimes the girls who come here not knowing if they will stay, or if they expect to be here only for a short time, will rent a mail box so that letters are not lost due to the postman not knowing they lived there.

FRED

Can I talk to some of the roomers here to see if they know anything about Lucy? Maybe she changed her mind and went to another house nearby.

MRS. SWEENEY

Friends have warned me that sometimes a married woman leaves her husband at home and goes to another place and adopts a new name so he can't find her. They also tell me that some of the

husbands are nasty to their wives. If you give him her new name and address, you might be hurting the women who can't get a divorce as they flee to find a new life.

FRED

It's not like that at all. I was never abusive to Lucy, and I knew she was interested in coming down here. I just want to ask her if we could go home together.

MRS. SWEENEY

I believe you. You were starting to tell me about your European trip. Nobody would be doing all those things for important people if they were bad.

FRED

I can assure you that if I find Lucy; and she wants me to leave without her, that is what I will do.

MRS. SWEENEY

OK. Sure, go ahead. Talk to anybody you want to.

MR. MYERS

Thank you, but I'm disappointed that you didn't know about Mr. Hoover. He's called a great humanitarian in Europe.

MRS. SWEENEY

The only Hoover I know is J. Edgar who runs some type of government police group. The reason I know about him is that a boarder here is one of his young men. Oh, yes, another one. I forgot the Hoover vacuum machine. That's another Hoover.

FRED

Oh, I heard something about those other Hoovers, but they are different people. My Herbert Hoover's famous because during and after the war he fed tens of thousands of people in European countries that had been devastated by the fighting.

MR. SWEENEY

You worked for him?

FRED

I did. Then, after the war, I went home to Pennsylvania because my father wanted me to have more experience before taking over his law firm—some day. Family calls for responsibility are louder than calls for adventure.

MRS. SWEENEY

I thought you told me you were just back from Paris having spent three months there.

FRED

I used Paris as my base and went throughout Europe tracking down records for Mr. Hoover.

MRS. SWEENEY

It sounds like you had your fun in Europe, maybe getting to know the English, French and Italian ladies, huh?

FRED

It wasn't like that at all. I carried out my duties, and Mr. Hoover is pleased.

MRS. SWEENEY

I imagine he is. I guess a hero wants everyone to see the documents showing that he is indeed a hero.

FRED

Anyway, I arrived in New York two days ago and took the train to Washington because Mr. Hoover wanted me to tell him personally about my success in obtaining those records. During the whole trip from Paris, I was thinking I should see Lucy in D.C. if she was really here. Since I was going to be in Washington, we could talk things through and go to Bristow together.

MRS. SWEENEY

Am I getting this right? You went to Europe alone for three months without your wife and your wife then came to D.C.

FRED

Yes, that's it. You make it sound funny.

MRS. SWEENEY

Tell me how it is not funny. So, you had no contact with your wife for three months?

FRED

Why do I have to explain my life to you?

MRS. SWEENEY

Because you are sittin' in my kitchen and want to talk to my roomers to find your wife. You can leave if you want to.

FRED

No, no. That's alright. I don't want to lose time wandering the streets of Washington.

MRS. SWEENEY

As I said before, you can talk to anyone.

FRED

Where was I? Oh, yes. After our honeymoon, we began to fight more and more. I thought that she had done enough with this women's right to vote. I believed that the approval of that silly amendment would get it out of her system, but no.

Lucy went back to the local group and started agitating for more women's rights. Contraception, divorce, and the right of inheritance were their topics. Let me repeat—I was working in my family's law firm. We couldn't be identified with all those women's issues.

MRS. SWEENEY

Her views could cost your firm business and therefore money. So, what did you do?

FRED

An opportunity presented itself when Mr. Hoover called and was willing to pay for three months in Europe. I thought that three months apart would give us an opportunity to think things over.

MRS. SWEENEY

She must be a lovely girl and very smart.

FRED

She is; but to tell the truth, I wanted to get away from all that arguing for a while. She was ready for

that too. She told me and others that she would be in some type of training at some women's rights group here in D.C.

MRS. SWEENEY

There are a few groups like that around here.

FRED

While spending these three months in Europe, I had a chance to think this over and I want her back. I also am willing to re-think my positions on these issues.

MRS. SWEENEY

Lordy, Lord, I can't believe my ears. A man willin' to change his mind, and about a woman!

FRED

While I was in Europe to do Mr. Hoover's business, I had the opportunity to talk to many high government officials in various countries. So, I took advantage of that circumstance to ask them about this women's rights movement. Many of them said

they came to understand that some changes sought by this movement could be positive and could improve their societies.

MRS. SWEENEY

Looking at the clock

My goodness, it's six o'clock already. I have to go finish some errands. You are welcome to stay here for a while, but not all night.

Fred sits at the table and looks at his watch. Carl enters carrying a bouquet of flowers.

CARL

Oops. Sorry, I didn't know that someone was in the kitchen. My name is Carl.

Holding out his hand

FRED

Hi, Carl. I'm Fred, Fred Myers. Good to meet you.

As they shake hands, Fred looks at the flowers.

FRED

Who's the lucky woman?

CARL

My girlfriend lives here. Tonight, we are going out alone for a romantic dinner.

FRED

You are lucky, Carl. And so am I. My wife's one sharp blade, and good to look at if you know what I mean.

CARL

I don't mean to pry but are you here to talk to Mrs. Sweeney. I just saw her walking down the block. She may not be back for a while.

FRED

No, not with her. I already talked to her for a while. She does have her opinions.

CARL

She does but she had a rough time of it with her husband dead and little money. She's a survivor.

FRED

You seem right about that, Carl.

CARL

Mr. Myers—

FRED

Call me Fred. We're about the same age.

CARL

I don't think we are the same age. It's OK with me though if you want it that way, Mr. Myers, and I'll call you Fred.

FRED

That's better. I'm here because my wife is supposed to be staying here or somewhere around here.

CARL

You mean you don't know where your wife is?

FRED

It's complicated. For several months, I had work to do in Europe and she wanted to come here. So, we went our separate ways.

CARL

You mean that you haven't talked to your wife in several months? And, that you don't have any way to get a hold of her? If I had a wife like you talked about, I wouldn't let her go.

FRED

Carl, I know you mean the best, but these women can't be controlled today. They got the damned right to vote and now they want to wear the pants in the house.

CARL

My Girlie is not like that. She's got a mind of her own, which I am thankful for, but she doesn't argue or demand, at least not much.

FRED

I should have asked you. Do you know of any one by the name of Lucy?

CARL

No, sorry.

FRED

She's about 5 feet 2 inches tall?

CARL

No.

FRED

She's got real pretty brown hair, usually up in a bun?

CARL

Nope.

FRED

She's got a real nice figure?

CARL

Nope, but my Girlie is like that. Maybe, they grew up together.

FRED

Where did your girlfriend grow up?

CARL

She's from Pennsylvania.

FRED

So is my wife. Boy, this is beginning to sound strange —like there are twins who live here.

CARL

There's a lot of nice girls who look like that but no one I know as Lucy. If you are goin' to stay here a while, I can ask Trixie. She's getting training at the women's party over in that big mansion a couple of blocks behind the Capitol.

FRED

Lucy said she wanted to work with some group like that. These women's righters!

*Some noises are heard of
people talking and singing.
Enter into the kitchen*

*Tommie, Birch, Elly, and
Trixie.*

TRIXIE

Fred!

FRED

Lucy!

CARL

Trixie, who is Lucy?

FRED

Lucy, who is Trixie?

ELLY

Are you Lucy's Fred?

CARL

Are you Trixie's Fred?

BIRCH

Who is Lucy?

TOMMIE

Who is Fred?

LUCY

This man is my husband Fred.

TOMMIE

I figured it out a while ago that you were married, but I didn't want to say anything that would embarrass you.

BIRCH

You mean that you were married all the time that you went out with Carl? Isn't that adultery?

LUCY

Wait a minute, Birch. Let's get some things clear. Fred, how did you know that I would be in this place?

FRED *with growing anger*

Some friends in Bristow told me. But, never did I expect to find you here sleeping with another man.

LUCY

Darn these small towns. Every day, people pry into each other's affairs and then pass judgement on what they hear from this gossip. They're not interested in the facts.

FRED

Well, Girlie, the facts show you're got your own little affair going on here. I was sitting in the kitchen waiting to ask if you lived around here, and Carl told me about the two of you.

LUCY

No, Fred, it's not like that at all.

FRED *His face getting redder,
and his voice louder.*

I got the impression that the two of you were going to a romantic dinner this evening. Is that right?

LUCY

Well, yes. That was the plan; but, that was before I knew you were here.

FRED

So now, it will be a romantic dinner for three?

LUCY

No! No! No! Let me explain.

FRED

This story alone should be worth the price of admission.

LUCY

When I planned this trip, I wanted to have a good time socially, and not just be hanging around the offices of the women's party. I wanted to see another part of life than what we have in Bristow.

FRED

Sarcastigly

Getting a young man to think that you are his Girlie is one way of being different.

LUCY

Fred, please let me finish. When I got here, I soon realized that there would be a lot of parties and bar sitting. I felt that it would not be good to go alone to a bar or to a party. So, early on I became pals with

Tommie, Elly, and Carl so that I could go somewhere with friends.

FRED

Did you make Carl your special “pal”?

LUCY

As time went by, I grew to appreciate Carl’s approach to life. He doesn’t let most things bother him. He doesn’t let mistakes in the past or dire warnings about the future upset him. He seeks to be focused on what is happening right now.

FRED

So, Carl’s both a lover and a philosopher.

TRIXIE

Fred, we are not used to that way of thinking. My life is usually rushing around and worrying about what might happen. So, Carl and I became good friends. I like him and think he has something to teach me.

CARL

Trixie's right. We started out formally; but, then I fell in love with her. I thought that she was single.

FRED

Did Lucy think that she was single too?

CARL

Whatever she thought about that, the basic fact is that you have re-gained her. Whatever doubt I hear in her voice, I sense her basic decision is that she wants to stay with you. Dang, it hurts me to say this, but she has picked you over me.

FRED

What about the dinner tonight for the love birds?

CARL

I demanded that so that I could make one last try for my Girlie. I knew that it would not work out for us, but I could dream. Mr. Myers, you don't appreciate your wife—leaving her alone for three months.

FRED

So, what about this closeness you have for one another?

LUCY

I have thought about it for a long time, and as great as I think Carl is, I do not want to jeopardize our marriage. I am willing to go home with you, Fred, and start over again.

FRED

Being away from you for so long made me re-think things. I want to be a better husband for you than I was before. But, Lucy, sleeping with another man is called adultery.

LUCY

I can assure you Fred we did not sleep together. It has been a platonic relationship.

CARL

Not my idea, but I went along with Trixie 'cause I love her so much and hoped to take her away from you. I could tell from what she has told me in the

last few days that my chances of success were not good.

FRED

So, there was no sleeping around, but I can't get it out of my head that my wife was carrying on a relationship—although supposedly platonic. What about our marriage?

LUCY

Fred, I have trouble getting over the fact that you left me for three months without even giving me a telephone number or the name of a hotel where I could reach you. And, for three months. I may have been foolish to push this pretense of being single but that's how you left me. I felt I was in a pretend marriage, and that I was really alone.

FRED

Damn it Lucy. You always have a way of twisting it around so its my fault. You could always get my hotels and phone numbers from the law firm. What

about all that time you spent with your women's causes?

LUCY

You say now that you are willing to talk about your positions on what you claimed a while ago were my socialist, feminist ideas. What does talking mean?

FRED

As I was starting to tell Mrs. Sweeney, I learned in Europe that some of these changes are over-due if we want to be fairer to women. Not all these ideas but some, like inheritance rights. So, what I mean, Lucy, is that after my trip I'm ready to take another look at these ideas. I have a more open mind than before.

LUCY

Thanks, Fred, I know that you are sincere, but once we get back home, all the same pressures will surround us. What if the law firm loses a client, like the Catholic Bishop, because I was quoted in the town paper saying something or another?

FRED

I can't predict the future. I can say though that you and I don't always agree, but I have great respect for your intelligence.

LUCY

Thank you, Fred. I can't predict the future either. But, I am ready to go home with you to see if we can build some trust between us. I can't see our marriage lasting without that trust. Is that OK with you?

FRED *Looking around,
then smiling*

I think that is the best deal I am going to get today, so, the answer is yes.

LUCY

Thank you Fred. Before we leave, let me introduce you to the bunch, my good new friends.

FRED

Of course, I met Carl, but I have not had the pleasure of meeting the others.

LUCY

Here's the bunch and its leader, Tommie.

Tommie knows how to enjoy life. And, you had better not be around him if you are snooty. He will use a coupala words to prick that balloon of vanity. Elly is now my best friend. She is a great listener and has good advice. Birch knows that he is not my favorite because of a clash of beliefs. Birch shows, though, an enthusiasm and energy that makes one get energized too.

FRED

It's nice to meet you folks, and thank you for taking good care of Lucy, Trixie, or Girlie. Or whatever she is called or calls herelf.

CARL

Mr. Myers, you got a special person here and frankly I wish that she was not married.

LUCY

Carl, if there is a life after this, the circumstances may be different.

FRED.

His face reddening.

Lucy, I can imagine your feelings for Carl. I'm willing to let these events stay here in D.C. if you promise me that this relationship with Carl is a thing of the past. Agreed?

LUCY

Looking at Carl, she responds slowly.

You know how hard this is going to be for me. But I understand why it is necessary to maintain our marriage. So, I agree.

FRED

I know that it will also be hard on the bunch, especially Carl. So, let me thank you and we wish you a Merry Christmas.

TRIXIE

I want to say that you guys are the best. You taught me a lot about making and keeping friendships. You taught me more about love in all its forms.

ELLY

Lucy or Trixie, we will miss you. Carl, I will go out for dinner with you to talk about all of this, if that would help.

LUCY

With tears in her eyes

Go, Elly! You guys are the best.

Everyone either laughs or cries, or does both. Fred hugs Lucy, rather awkwardly.

Lucy smiles at Carl with tears in her eyes

Tommie turns and faces the audience.

TOMMIE

We hope that you have enjoyed Lucy's tale. There is one last part to this story. Did the couple live happily ever after? Let's see by returning to where we started. It is 1975 again. In the same kitchen we have seen throughout this story, Lucy has just ended her recounting to Mrs. Herrity of these meaningful events.

Scene 6. A Special Gift for Trixie

Sitting in the kitchen with the contractor, Mrs. Herrity, Lucy is exhausted as she concludes the story.

MRS. HERRITY

That is some telling, Lucy. Can I conclude that the couple lived happily ever after?

LUCY

No, not exactly. Fred and I were married nearly fifty years before he died, and in that period we thought of divorce three or four times. We worked out our differences, even when divorce became an easier option.

MRS. HERRITY

That shows commitment.

LUCY

During all that turmoil, I told myself that it was the wisest thing to have stuck with Fred.

MRS. HERRITY

I think I have something for you. As I said earlier, my husband has been digging out the basement to make it a larger space. While in the farthest back part, he saw some papers sticking out of the support beams. He pulled them out and it was a couple letters between a Girlie and a Carl.

LUCY

When Carl and I were talking through this situation he sent me a letter and I wrote an answer, but I decided that it would be best not to send that response or let his letter become known. So, one day I hid them in the basement of this building. I was hoping if I could get into the basement, I would look for them. That didn't seem possible. May I see them?

MRS. HERRITY

Sure, hon. With what you have gone through that is the least I can do for you. I've been keeping them here in my drawer. I read them and you will see a Carl who was very devoted to you.

She hands over to Lucy several sheets of folded yellowed paper. As Lucy unfolds the fifty-year old letters, she begins to cry.

LUCY

At last I have something from my dear Carl to remember him and those days. Oh, I can't thank you enough Mrs. Herrity.

MRS. HERRITY

*With tears in their eyes,
Mrs. Herrity and Lucy
get up from the table
and begin to leave the
kitchen.*

I'm glad you came here today. Should I say Lucy, Trixie, or Girlie?

*The two women
smile and hug one
another as they say
their goodbyes.*

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This story was imagined after the playwright and his husband found two letters hidden in a support beam in the basement of an old house they were restoring in Washington, D.C. fifty-years ago. The names and details of the story have been changed from those in the letters.

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