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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,—