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Dramatic Publishing

Included in the American Association of
Community Theatre AACT NewPlayFest
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Exit Laughing



Comedy
By Paul Elliott

The Springfield Little Theatre production of *Exit Laughing* "broke all house records for any non-musical in the 50-year history of this theatre. After the first preview, we sold out every performance (480 seats) at full price for its entire run."
Beth Domann, Executive Director of the historic Landers Theatre.

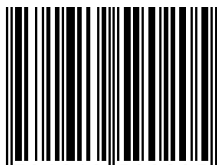


Exit Laughing

Comedy. By Paul Elliott. Cast: 1m., 4w. When the biggest highlight in your life for the past 30 years has been your weekly bridge night out with the "girls," what do you do when one of your foursome inconveniently dies? If you're Connie, Leona and Millie, three southern ladies from Birmingham, you "borrow" the ashes from the funeral home for one last card game, and the wildest, most exciting night of your lives involves a police raid, a stripper and a whole new way of looking at all the fun you can have when you're truly living.
One int. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: E86.

*Springfield Little Theatre, Springfield, Mo., featuring (l-r) Judy Luxton, Nanette Crighon and Sandy Skoglund-Young. Photo: Gerry Averett.
Cover design: Susan Carle.*

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Exit Laughing

Comedy by
PAUL ELLIOTT



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(EXIT LAUGHING)

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“*Exit Laughing* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by the Springfield Little Theatre in Springfield, Mo.”

Exit Laughing was premiered by the Springfield Little Theatre in Springfield, Mo., on Nov. 15, 2013 with the following cast:

Rachel Michelle Sturm
Connie Judy Luxton
Leona Nanette Crighton
Millie Sandy Skoglund-Young
Bobby Vince Miller
ButterButt Buddy

Production:

Director John R. “Chuck” Rogers
Set Design John R. “Chuck” Rogers
Lighting and Sound Jamie Bower
Costume Design Kris Haik
Costumes Maxine Whittaker
Stage Manager Garth Domes
Properties Jan Myers, Dennis Stewart
Wigs Rick Charton
Slide Show Design Karen Richter
Set Construction Jeff Hammock, Celine Snyder,
Marilyn Kleine, Noah Sheets,
Scott Obert, Barb Parker, Mark Mauzey,
Jasmine Gill, Kiersten Andersen

Exit Laughing

CHARACTERS

RACHEL ANN: 21, a young woman who seems to have issues with life and men until bridge night opens her eyes.

CONNIE HARLAND: 55-year-old mother of Rachel, who finds on this fateful bridge night that life doesn't end at 55.

LEONA: One of Connie's closest friends and a member of the bridge club for over 30 years. A woman who's a beautician by profession and a rather caustic lush by preference.

MILLIE: Another of Connie's friends and a long-standing member of the bridge club. This is a woman who moves to her own special drummer, even though she's the only one who can hear him.

POLICEMAN / BOBBY: 23, a young man of many talents, and they all come to "bare" on the ladies' bridge night.

BUTTER-BUTT: The cat.

Exit Laughing

ACT I

AT RISE: *The living/dining room of 55-year-old CONNIE HARLAND's vintage home outside of Birmingham, Alabama. It's early evening on a warm summer night. The year doesn't really matter. It's the South. Nobody cares.*

After a beat, RACHEL ANN, a moderately attractive 21-year-old college student, pushes through the front door in a frustration bordering on depression. She carries an armload of books.

CONNIE (*from the kitchen*). That you, Rachel?

(RACHEL doesn't answer. She just drops all of her books like a bomb on the floor in one loud crash.)

CONNIE (*cont'd, from the kitchen*). Goodness. Rachel. Are you OK?

(CONNIE, dressed in black, enters through the swinging door from the kitchen, wiping her hands. She sees RACHEL standing there with the books at her feet.)

CONNIE (*cont'd*). Oh honey, don't leave them there. Not today. Leona and Millie are coming ... And what are you doing home so early?

RACHEL. I got stood up. (*Heads into the kitchen, swinging the door open.*)

CONNIE. What?

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). Don't ask.

CONNIE (*following her to the door*). Honey, I'm your mama. I'm supposed to ask.

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). I got stood up.

CONNIE. I got that part. (*Seeing the books and bending over to pick them up.*) It's the who, what and where I'm waiting for?

(*RACHEL's voice stops her mid bend.*)

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). And don't pick up the books. Leave them there as a monument to everything stupid. Stupid men! And stupid me.

CONNIE. What have you got to be stupid about?

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). For putting myself out there. For thinking I might finally get a boyfriend.

CONNIE. Oh, come on, Rachel, you're a beautiful young girl with lots of person—

RACHEL (*re-entering*). Lot's of what? Personality? That's like describing a girl as one step above psycho. (*Rushing to a mirror.*) And look at me, I look like Medusa ... And these eyebrows. They're like two yeti mating.

CONNIE. Oh, Rachel, stop being so dramatic.

RACHEL. I'm supposed to be dramatic. I'm a theatre major.

CONNIE. Onstage. Not off. And come here. You're a beautiful young woman—

RACHEL. Yeah, but you have to say that. You're my mother.

CONNIE. Well, it's true even if I am.

RACHEL (*sinking into a chair in despair*). Stood up. Deserted. Left behind. Mom, I'm going to end my life just like you.

CONNIE. Excuse me?

RACHEL. Never going out. Never dating. All alone.

CONNIE. I do go out ... to the grocery store. And I've got you. I wouldn't call that alone.

RACHEL. But what about a man?

CONNIE. What about a man?

RACHEL. When was the last time you actually had a date?
(*When CONNIE doesn't answer right away.*) I'll bet it hasn't been since Dad left us and that's been over ...

CONNIE. I know how long it's been and trust me, if you'd been married to your father, you'd understand why I'm not in that big a rush.

RACHEL. But 15 years?

CONNIE. So I'm a slow healer. There are worse things than being alone.

RACHEL. Name one?

CONNIE. Aside from your father ... ? Constipation. (*On RACHEL's look.*) I don't know. It was just the first thing that came to my mind. Rachel, I'm sorry you got stood up. Whoever he was, he doesn't know what he's missing.

RACHEL. Well, I know what I'm missing: a life. I feel like locking myself in my room and never coming out.

CONNIE. Oh, come on, honey, you're not 16 any more, and it's not the end of the world.

RACHEL. Maybe, it's not for you. But for me, I don't see any long line of guys beating down my door trying to take my virginity.

CONNIE. I thought we decided that was a good thing.

RACHEL. When I was 12, yes. But that was 10 years ago.

CONNIE. You know, I don't think I'm old enough to have this conversation.

RACHEL. I didn't say "give it up," Mother, but I sure as heck would like somebody to try to take it for once. I feel like I'm in a college of raging rutting hormones and nobody even sniffs in my direction.

CONNIE. Well, maybe you bathe more than most.

RACHEL. This is not a laughing matter. I don't see anything funny about being a loser. Or "not" being a loser, depending on how you look at it. I was really excited about tonight. He was cute. He was smart. He was ...

CONNIE. I'm sorry.

RACHEL. I even bought a new dress.

CONNIE. Was it pretty?

RACHEL. Who cares if it was pretty? It's going to hang there in my closet for the rest of my life, rotting like something out of *Great Expectations* ... (*Crossing back into the kitchen.*) And it's all your fault.

CONNIE. Honey, what did I have to do with anything?

RACHEL (*from the kitchen*). You're my mother. I have to blame somebody.

CONNIE. Well, don't blame me. I was at the funeral home all day.

(RACHEL comes back from the kitchen, this time with BUTTER-BUTT, a large furry cat, in her arms.)

RACHEL. Oh, crap. I'm sorry. How was it?

CONNIE. Not what you'd call a barrel of laughs.

RACHEL. How are Miss Leona and Miss Millie taking it?

CONNIE. Who can tell? We're all sort of numb. They're stopping by. What are you doing with Miss Mary's cat?

RACHEL. I'm taking Butter-Butt to my room. We've both been left alone in the world to fend for ourselves.

CONNIE. I know the feeling.

RACHEL. I guess it's been a cruddy day all around.

CONNIE. I don't think black is my color.

RACHEL (*heading up the stairs*). Give it to me then. Today I feel as old as you. You know, it just burns me up. If I ever hear the name Bobby again in this house, I think I'll die.

CONNIE. Bobby?

RACHEL. Mom? Why don't you just rub salt in my wounds while you're at it?

CONNIE. Rachel, I'm sorry. I just didn't know that name.

RACHEL. Well, you won't ever hear it again. That name is banned forever. *(Starts up the stairs.)*

CONNIE *(exiting into the kitchen)*. OK, OK. Anyway, I'm sorry.

(There is a knock at the door.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, from the kitchen)*. Will you get that? It's probably the girls.

(Feeling put upon, RACHEL comes back down the stairs and goes to the door.)

RACHEL. With my luck, it's probably a mugger. That's the way my day's been going.

(She opens the door and finds nobody there, just a boxed package on the porch, which she picks up. She has to now juggle both the cat and the box just to get it inside.)

CONNIE *(from the kitchen)*. Is it Leona or Millie?

RACHEL *(shouting back to her mother)*. No. It wasn't them.

(She puts the box down on the side table and continues back up the stairs with Butter-Butt.)

CONNIE *(from the kitchen)*. What?

RACHEL *(exiting upstairs)*. Never mind. Nobody was there. The story of my life.

(CONNIE returns from the kitchen with a couple of plates, which she sets down on the buffet. Looking and finding RACHEL gone, her shoulders slump, and for a moment she looks like she might cry.)

Just then, the front door slams open, and LEONA enters without knocking. Dressed in black and with the deep voice of a heavy hitter, she surveys the situation for just a beat before exclaiming.)

LEONA. God, I need a drink.

CONNIE. Help yourself.

LEONA. You look like crap.

CONNIE. Good, I feel like crap.

(Both women hug as old friends.)

LEONA. I forgot the cookies.

CONNIE. I don't think we're gonna feel like eating anyway.

LEONA. Right, you can't drink cookies. *(Noticing the books on the floor.)* What's that?

CONNIE. What? Oh, Rachel's monument to stupid men.

LEONA. Maybe she ought to try for someone a little taller.

CONNIE *(picking the books up and moving them to a shelf)*. She's just depressed.

LEONA. Join the club. *(Finding a bottle of liquor and clutching it to her chest.)* At least now, I'm saved. Where's a glass? *(Holding up the bottle and looking at it more closely.)* Rum? Is this all you've got? Rum? Nobody drinks rum.

CONNIE. Sorry. I'm sure there's something else in the kitchen. Behind the breadbox.

LEONA *(crossing through the swinging door into the kitchen)*. Even I don't drink rum. A lush has to have some dignity. And I know that's what you call me behind my back. A lush. *(Heads into the kitchen.)*

CONNIE. I never. I'd never do that.

LEONA *(from the kitchen)*. Well, *she* did. Mary.

CONNIE. Well, Mary said a lot of things she didn't necessarily mean.

(LEONA returns from the kitchen with a bottle of vodka and a glass. She's pouring herself a healthy drink and slugs it.)

CONNIE *(cont'd)*. Oh, come on, Leona, don't drink that so fast.

LEONA. Now you're sounding like Mary.

CONNIE. Well, maybe she was right.

LEONA. Yeah, well, now she's dead. Damn her.

CONNIE. It's not like she did it on purpose.

LEONA. Well, she did it anyway.

CONNIE. We knew it was just a matter of time. I just didn't realize what it would feel like when it happened.

LEONA. And could you believe the funeral home. I thought Mary said she didn't have any living relatives.

CONNIE. Maybe she didn't consider trailer trash "living."

LEONA. I never saw any of them visiting her, or heard Mary speak of them.

CONNIE. And suddenly after all these years, they're in control. They're gonna bury Mary—just because she's dead.

LEONA. And she didn't want to be buried.

CONNIE. I know. I know.

LEONA. And we promised. The three of us.

CONNIE. I know.

LEONA. "Spread my ashes over the most beautiful places you can find." We promised.

CONNIE. I just want to scream, or cry, or be sick.

LEONA. Or get drunk.

CONNIE. How could everything get so screwed up?

LEONA. At least you got her cremated.

CONNIE. Thank God I had that in writing. I swear two of those vultures would have dumped her straight from the hospital into the ground if they'd have gotten here any sooner. They were complaining about the cost of the funeral home.

LEONA. Well there's nothing we can do about it now. Legally they're holding all the cards.

CONNIE. I'd like to tell them what they can do with all those cards.

(Both turn as they hear MILLIE fumbling with the front door.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, as though it needs no explanation)*. That's gotta be Millie. *(Calling out as she crosses to the door.)* It's not locked!

(CONNIE opens the door, and MILLIE literally stumbles in the room sideways.)

CONNIE *(cont'd, grabbing for MILLIE to keep her from falling)*. Millie! For crying out loud, it has a door knob.

MILLIE *(trying to regain composure)*. But my hands were full.

(And they are. She carries a large grocery bag carefully in her arms.)

LEONA *(crossing to help, she whips the bag out of MILLIE's grasp)*. What'd you bring? Hopefully, more liquor.

MILLIE *(taking off her black hat)*. Not exactly.

CONNIE. How not exactly?

LEONA *(sticking her hand inside the bag)*. Let me guess. I feel ... I feel ...

MILLIE. Mary.

LEONA. No. Don't tell me. I feel ...

MILLIE. Mary.

(Suddenly, LEONA freezes.)

LEONA. Omigod, it is Mary!! *(Jerks her hand back as though discovering a snake in the bag.)*

CONNIE. What?

LEONA & MILLIE. Mary!

LEONA *(looking for a place to put the sack)*. Omigod, omigod! How did I end up with this thing? Oooo, ooooo. Oooo.

CONNIE. Just put her down. Anywhere?

(LEONA sets the sack on the table and backing away, rubs her hands on CONNIE.)

LEONA. Ick. Ick. Ick. Ick. Ick.

MILLIE. Oh, stop acting so silly.

LEONA. I'm not acting silly, Millie. *(Grimacing at how that came out.)* I've always made it perfectly clear at the beauty parlor, I don't do dead people.

MILLIE. But Leona, we're not at your beauty parlor, and it's not just any dead people. *(Pulling a rather drab looking urn from the bag and placing it on the table.)* It's Mary.

LEONA. Excuse me. If she's in that urn, she's a dead people.

CONNIE *(whispering urgently)*. Millie, what's she doing here? How?

MILLIE. Well, it *is* bridge night.

CONNIE. What?

CONNIE & LEONA. She's dead.

MILLIE. Well, you don't have to be so ugly about it.

LEONA. What's ugly about calling a frizzy perm a frizzy perm ... Or in this case, a corpse a ...

MILLIE *(getting upset)*. I'm not asking you to fix her hair.

LEONA. She's cremated. She doesn't have any hair.

MILLIE *(getting indignant)*. Well, let me tell you this about that. The way you're acting, I wouldn't ask you to fix her hair anyway. And I thought you were her friend. I thought you'd want her here.

CONNIE *(calling for time out)*. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

LEONA *(equally upset and shouting)*. I *am* her friend. *Was* her friend. But ... she's dead.

CONNIE. Whoa, whoa, Whoa!!!!

(LEONA and MILLIE turn to CONNIE as she tries to compose herself.)

CONNIE (*cont'd, gesticulating, trying to figure out how to phrase this*). Uh ... I don't know how ... I mean ... How did you ... Her ... You ... How?

MILLIE (*giggling at CONNIE's waving arms*). Oh, is this like charades?

LEONA. No, no Millie. (*A beat.*) What Connie is asking in her simple but not-wanting-to-offend-anyone way is ... Where the crap did you get Mary?

MILLIE (*catching on*). Oh, I just picked her up. It was my day to carpool.

CONNIE. But the funeral home was closed. Locked.

MILLIE. Well, I did sorta have to break a window.

CONNIE. You what?!

MILLIE (*excited*). It was just like on television. You know, where you take a rock and ... You know, and tap it. Well, maybe a couple of times, but then ... It was easy. Well, it wasn't really that easy. It'd been easier if I had broken the pane right over the lock, but I broke the one ...

CONNIE. I get the picture.

MILLIE. So, I had to reach ... But the door just clicked open ...

CONNIE. What possessed you?

MILLIE. Well, you two were so upset, and I thought since it was bridge night.

LEONA & CONNIE. But Mary's dead.

MILLIE. So?

CONNIE. Millie, you stole Mary's body from the funeral home.

MILLIE. I didn't steal her. I just picked her up. I mean they're going to bury her tomorrow. I thought breaking the window would be easier than having to dig her up next week.