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Dramatic Publishing



A PLAY IN ONE ACT

Lily Daw and the Three Ladies

A play by RUTH PERRY
based on a story by EUDORA WELTY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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LILY DAW AND THE THREE LADIES

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LILY DAW AND THE THREE LADIES

A Play in One Act

For Three Men and Seven Women

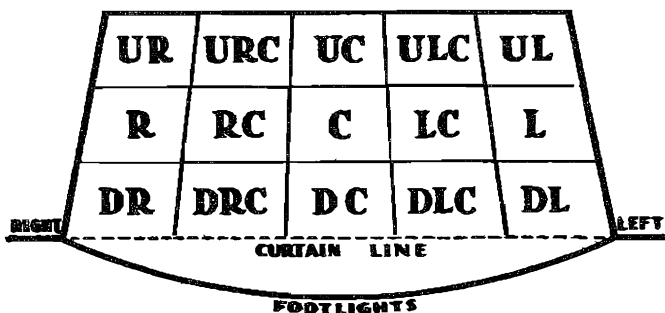
CHARACTERS

ED NEWTON.....*proprietor of general store*
LILY DAW.....*a young girl*
AIMEE SLOCUM.....*the postmistress*
BILL CASEY.....*a young man*
MRS. ETTA WATTS.....*a widow*
MRS. CARSON.....*the minister's wife*
MRS. BENSON.....*the sheriff's wife*
MISS LIND.....*the church organist*
ESTELLE MABERS.....*a passerby*
YOUNG MAN.....*a musician*

PLACE: *The small town of Victory, Mississippi.*

TIME: *A summer day.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PRODUCTION NOTES

STAGING:

The stage is divided into three areas. In Area A is a long table or two tables pushed together which represent the general store and a postal window in Victory, Mississippi. If desired, the tables may be covered with dark burlap, reaching to the floor in front and at the sides. There may be a real or assumed change-drawer in the back. A small tap bell may be used when the drawer is opened or closed. At one end of the table there may be some bolts of yard goods. If there is not room for them on top of the counter they may be stored until needed on racks placed beneath it and concealed by the burlap. Also in evidence on the counter are some notions, thread, a large pair of shears, some paper bags, toilet soaps and a box of round, fluffy nylon net pot-scrubbers, some colored and some white. The postal window at the other end of the counter is for transacting sales of stamps, money orders, etc. At rise of curtain a card marked: CLOSED is in front of the window. A sign above the window states: U. S. POST OFFICE, VICTORY, MISSISSIPPI. There should also be a slot for posting letters.

Area B is LILY'S front porch R. The porch area may be designated by two flower-boxes of real or artificial zinnias set at a raked angle. There are two rocking chairs and an ice cream type drug store chair with a wire back.

Area C is upstage and represents the station platform at which Number One will arrive and from which it will depart. The train effect is conveyed by a whistle, puffs of steam and the ringing of a bell and chug-chug effects (available on records if desired). The sound effects supply a note of realism but are not at all necessary for enjoyment of the play.

SPECIAL PROPERTIES:

The hat, which Lily Daw presumably makes, is, of course, made in advance. It consists of a tiny hat base or form to which two or three black or green round nylon-net pot-scrubbers have been fastened. A colorful zinnia makes the central decoration. The effect can be very chic. The wedding veil is already prepared and placed under the store counter. Ed merely seems to cut it from a bolt of material and Lily seems to assemble it. It consists of a length of nylon or cotton white net, crisp enough to stand free when fastened in place. It has been attached by one corner to a small white hat form base bearing two or three white nylon net pot-scrubbers. The length should suit the height of the actress playing the part of Lily.

The xylophone box may be any rather flat box plausible as a container for a xylophone. It should be painted black and labeled in white block letters, XYLOPHONE.

ABOUT LILY:

One question inevitably arises in rehearsal of this play: Was Lily Daw actually feeble-minded? There are alternative possibilities. Was she, perhaps, a border-line case? Or may she merely have been a shy, imaginative, inexperienced and rather flighty young girl who merely seemed feeble-minded to the matter-of-fact middle-aged ladies of the town? Each production will have its own special slant as this question is decided.

Eudora Welty, the author, does not commit herself on the issue when she writes of the well-meaning ladies of the town who assert that Lily is feeble-minded, any more than Shakespeare advocates

murder when Lady Macbeth urges her husband to "screw his courage to the sticking point and he'll not fail." In each case it is the individual character or characters that speak. Certainly the xylophone player would not agree with the ladies.

Katherine Anne Porter, who wrote the introduction to the Modern Library edition of Selected Stories of Eurdora Welty, said categorically: "Lily Daw is a half-witted girl in the grip of social forces represented by a group of earnest ladies bent on doing the best thing for her no matter what the consequences." So, that's one opinion.

The ladies agree that Lily is feeble-minded, and the town of Victory, Mississippi has accepted their diagnosis, partly because their motives are unquestionably good. If there was ever a competent medical opinion, it has not been mentioned in the story. The playwright remembers a barred Plymouth Rock chick, removed to safety from the concerted onslaught of a pen full of white leghorns who were pecking it to death for being different, and opts for Lily and the xylophone player. Each must decide for himself. Shall we sigh for Ellisville robbed of a potentially talented basket-weaver, or shall we join the happy guests at Lily's wedding with the xylophone player?

NOTES ON CHARACTERS
AND COSTUMES

ED NEWTON: He is the proprietor of the general store in a small town in Mississippi. He is slightly plump, middle-aged, wears nondescript gray pants, a faded shirt with sleeves rolled up, and a limp straw hat.

LILY: She is still in her teens and delightfully fresh and pretty, yet with something a little strange and distraught in her face. Her hair is loose on her shoulders, and she wears a dark pant suit or skirt and blouse - probably a hand-me-down which she has decorated with strategically placed appliques of neon-bright flowers (or painted with brilliant stylized animals in lively action). For the scene at her home, she wears a white shift and a hat. For travel, Lily wears a simple white dress, white pumps and a dowdy blue hat. Her hair may be pinned back with only a pin or two so that it can easily float free when the pins are removed and she dons the bridal veil.

AIMEE SLOCUM: She is a small, spry spinster.

BILL CASEY: He is handsome and in his late teens. He is casually dressed.

ETTA WATTS: She is a rather plump lady of the managing type. She wears widow's black. When dressed for travel, Mrs. Watts wears her usual mourning dress but carries her best black dress-fan adorned with sequins.

MRS. CARSON: She is plump and kindly. Though she is warm and friendly, she has a full sense of her important position in the community as wife of the Baptist preacher. When dressed for travel, Mrs.

Carson wears a dark print dress, dark pumps, a small black hat, and her best amber beads.

MRS. BENSON: She is the Sheriff's wife.

MISS LIND: She is the church organist.

ESTELLE MABERS: She is casually dressed and carries a string bag with a parcel or two in it.

YOUNG MAN: He wears a red coat and a hat.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL

GENERAL STORE: On counter: school tablets, pot-scrubbers, bars of soap, wash cloths, bolts of yard goods, shears, other items as desired, all covered by gray dust cloth. Under counter: length of wire, red streamer reading SPECIAL! 19¢, paper bag. Postal window and pigeonholes for mail, CLOSED sign on window.

LILY'S PORCH: Two rockers, wire ice cream chair, flower boxes with zinnias (optional).

PERSONAL

ED: Handkerchief.

LILY: Little straw basket with a bow, containing plastic cut-outs of flowers or the word LOVE. Small old-fashioned trunk lined with colorful patterned paper, containing the soap and wash cloth; zinnia.

AIMEE: Battered handbag containing compact of white face powder. Small wrapped parcel; neatly ironed handkerchief.

BILL: Partially filled mail bag containing mail, including letter in long business envelope. Wheelbarrow containing Lily's trunk, now roped, and partially filled mail bag.

MRS. WATTS: Scrap of cotton material. Cake box, fan.

MRS. CARSON: Tape measure, thimble, red emery strawberry pincushion. Small Bible.

ESTELLE: Bottle of orange drink, straw, string bag with a parcel or two in it.

YOUNG MAN: Small red memorandum book and pencil, black box labeled XYLOPHONE in large letters.

Lily Daw and the Three Ladies

SCENE: The combined general store and post office in the town of Victory, Mississippi. (See Production Notes for an easy way of achieving the desired effect.) The counter is covered with a gray dust cloth. ED NEWTON, proprietor of the store, ENTERS briskly R. He is a slightly plump, middle-aged man, wearing nondescript gray pants, a faded shirt with rolled sleeves, and a limp straw hat. He removes his hat, places it under the counter, wipes his brow with his handkerchief, removes the dust cloth, gives it a quick shake over the counter, folds it neatly, dusts his shoes lightly with it and places it under the counter. He prepares to string a wire about ten inches over the counter. As he is getting the wire from under the counter, LILY DAW ENTERS L, rather furtively. She is still in her teens and delightfully fresh and pretty, yet with something a little strange and distraught in her face. She tiptoes in. It is evident she is up to some mischief. Her hair is loose on her shoulders and she wears a dark pant suit or skirt and blouse, probably a hand-me-down which she has decorated with strategically placed appliques of neon-bright flowers [or painted with brilliant stylized animals in lively action--prancing horses with manes and tails flowing,

or flights of birds]. She carries a little straw basket with a bow in lieu of a purse. She looks at the postal window, sticks out the tip of her tongue at it, takes out some plastic cutouts and proceeds to decorate the bare area with several flower cutouts or the word LOVE in individual, boxed vari-colored letters. In the meantime, ED has stretched the wire and started hanging school tablets over it. As he reaches for a red streamer announcing that they are SPECIAL! 19¢, he alerts to Lily's activities, stops, and stands watching her. LILY steps back to admire the effect she has produced and laughs delightedly.)

ED (seriously, warning her). You'd better watch out what you're doing there, Lily Daw.

LILY (starting, gasps and backs away a step or two; defensively). It's pretty----

ED. To deface the post office is a federal offense.

LILY (glumly). I c'n take 'm down.

ED (lost in legal intricacies). Naw, you'd best leav' m be----

LILY. You said----

ED (scratching his head thoughtfully). Some might hold once you've put 'm there they're federal property. Removin' federal property could land you in a peck of trouble.

LILY (plucking up courage, gives her head a little toss and crosses to counter). 'Twon't matter to me. I'll have me a new name. So they can't find me. (Proudly.) I'm gettin' married today!

ED (kindly). Married! Well, land sakes! Who's the lucky man?

- LILY. His name's . . . (Pauses, biting her lower lip and glancing warily back at the postal window.) You might tell the Post Office!
- ED (cheerfully). Not me. (To business.) Was there something I could get you?
- LILY (snatching up two round, fluffy nylon net pot scrubbers admiringly). These!
- ED (benevolently). Well, seein' as it's a special occasion, they'll be on the house. (Puts the two balls in a paper bag.)
- LILY (snatching a third ball). This one, too . . .
- ED. Well--okay.
- LILY (wheedling). I'm fixin' to pack my hope chest. What'll you give me for it?
- ED (the glow fading). Well--what more do you need?
- LILY (snatching up two bars of lurid pink soap). These. (ED slips them into a paper bag and holds them out to her.) And this. (LILY grabs a green wash cloth and sticks it in the bag. The remote whistle of a train is heard offstage.)
- ED (handing her the bag and speaking firmly). And that'll be all today. You run along home now, Lily Daw, and pack your hope chest. Bill Casey'll be here any minute with the mail
- LILY (smiling shyly). Maybe I'll wait.
- ED. No, Lily. You go home now. (Glances L, from which direction we hear the clip-clip of heels.) Here comes Aimee Slocum. Likely she'll be mad as a wet hen when she sees what you done to her window! (But at mention of Aimee, LILY is already in motion. She EXITS R, wagging the bag at ED in farewell.)

(AIMEE ENTERS L. She is a small, spry spinster. She goes directly behind the counter, removes the CLOSED sign from the postal window and places it and her rather battered handbag beneath the counter. ED has gone back to hanging tablets. BILL CASEY ENTERS R with a mail bag, partially filled. He is casually dressed, handsome and in his late teens. He is well aware that ladies usually find him irresistible.)

BILL (cheerily). Morning, Miss Slocum. Mornin', Ed. (Places bag behind postal area. About to leave, he notices Lily's decorations. Indicates them.) See you been fixin' the place up. Boss's birthday? (Names the U.S. President.) _____ 'll say you done him proud!

AIMEE (joining him front and surveying the display with disapproval). This'll be Lily Daw's work. That girl!

BILL (grinning and winking at ED). Pretty cute, if you ask me.

AIMEE (righteously). You just remember the promise you Victory boys all made us ladies of the Helping Hand. None of that flirty stuff, Bill Casey!

BILL (with mock reproach and lavish male charm, speaking with assumed tenderness). Why, Miss Slocum, you know I wouldn't dare make a pass at a girl! (Lightly puts an arm around her, gazing deeply into her eyes.) You know you can trust me!

AIMEE (falling for it, warmly). Of course I trust you, Bill. (ED slightly clears his throat and AIMEE sees the mischief in BILL'S glance. She steps free of him and speaks crisply.) Just

see that I continue to!

BILL (starting exit R). Lily Daw----(Gives a muted wolf whistle and EXITS R.)

AIMEE (looking after him). I'm glad we wrote Ellisville. Something's got to be done about Lily Daw and done soon! (AIMEE crosses quickly back of the counter, snaps the CLOSED sign back in place over the window and begins to sort and distribute mail.)

(ENTER L MRS. ETTA WATTS. She is a rather plump lady of the managing type. She is wearing widow's black.)

MRS. WATTS (coming to the counter). Mornin', Ed. Mail out yet?

ED. Mornin', Mrs. Watts. Any time now.

MRS. WATTS (with satisfaction). Figured I'd have about time to match this percale. (Proffers a scrap of cotton material.)

ED (taking sample). Well, I guess I can match that all right. (Pulls out bolt of material from pile and lays sample against it.) Yep. How much do you need?

MRS. WATTS. Not more'n a quarter of a yard. (ED thumps out a length of percale, measures it against the counter and picks up a large pair of shears.) That's the navy blue. Mine's the black print.

ED (inspecting it). Well, so it is! (Folds up the material, replaces the bolt, rummages through the pile and then looks under the counter to find the black print.)

(MRS. CARSON ENTERS L. She is plump and kindly, has a tape measure around her neck and hanging down in front, a thimble on her finger and a red emery strawberry pincushion

pinned to her bosom. Though warm and friendly, she has a full sense of her important position in the community as wife of the Baptist preacher.)

MRS. CARSON. Mornin', Ed. Mornin', Etta.
Aimee still on the mail?

MRS. WATTS. She is. I see you're sewing.

MRS. CARSON. I hated to stop--with the bazaar only two weeks away. But I'm expecting an important letter.

MRS. WATTS (knowingly). It's about time we heard from Ellisville.

AIMEE (emerges from back of postal window, her hands full of mail). It's come! (While talking, she hands a long business-type envelope to MRS. CARSON.) The letter's come! It's addressed to you.

(MRS. BENSON and MISS LIND ENTER. They are respectively the Sheriff's wife and the church organist. They wait for the mail to be distributed, reacting curiously to what goes on.)

MRS. CARSON (handing the letter to MRS. WATTS).
You open it, Etta. My hands are just trembling!

MRS. WATTS (examining the envelope, reading slowly and impressively). From the Ellisville Institute for the Feeble-Minded of Mississippi. (Tears open the envelope, unfolds letter and reads importantly.) "Mrs. Carson, Chairman of the Helping Hand Committee, First Baptist Church, Victory, Mississippi." (Pauses and notices that all are listening. Hesitates.)

AIMEE (eagerly). Go on. What do they say?

MRS. WATTS. It's a committee matter. We can read it together. (MRS. CARSON and AIMEE