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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **THOSE CRAZY LADIES IN THE HOUSE ON THE CORNER**

**A Play  
by  
PAT COOK**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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(THOSE CRAZY LADIES IN THE HOUSE ON THE CORNER)

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# THOSE CRAZY LADIES IN THE HOUSE ON THE CORNER

A Play in Two Acts  
For Four Men and Five Women

## CHARACTERS

DORA MILLER ..... a woman in her 60s  
MAGGIE BROWN ..... her younger sister, about 60  
LYDIA VAN HORN ..... the middle sister, early 60s  
DR. ARNOLD "DOC" LOMAX ..... a physician, in his 40s  
JEAN MITCHELL ..... a nurse, mid-20s  
CALVIN MURPHY ..... her boyfriend, mid-20s  
PHILLIP VAN HORN ..... son of Lydia, mid-30s  
JESSIE ..... a woman in her late 40s  
BLUE ..... delivery boy, late teens

TIME: The present, in the fall.

PLACE: The Brown house.

## ACT ONE

**SCENE:** *The living room of the old Brown house.*

**AT RISE:** *DORA is sitting on the sofa stirring her iced tea. LYDIA is sitting next to her reading an old copy of LIFE. MAGGIE is sitting in a near wing back chair staring idly at the ceiling. These three sisters share that most cherished trait of a close family—they can sense each others thoughts and feelings and can go for quite some time enjoying each others company without uttering a word. However, on the other side of the coin, when they do speak, they very often all talk at the same time, sounding like a gang of magpies. It is just one of these comfortable silences that has the SISTERS spellbound. They sit quietly for a long pause. Then:*

**MAGGIE.** And another thing. The next time we send down to that high-priced grocery store, I think we ought to ask first about any generic products. Store brands they got now are just as good as brand names and sometimes better but for sure cheaper, not to mention if we bought in larger quantities. I can't tell you how many times we run outta Crisco just when I get the urge for fried chicken. You know, the real crispy kind like they make at that fast food place, only we don't never go there but I sure wish we would...

**DORA** (*cue from "grocery store"*). Well, we don't *have* to always go to that grocery store. I mean there must be ump-

teen others around town and it ain't like that's the only place in town. I heard on the radio about one of those cut-rate places just opened up. I think it's one of those where you have to bring your own sacks or something and you can get things right outta the crates they come in which I think is a pretty good idea. I can't believe nobody ain't thought of that before now, it seems so simple you'd think one of us woulda thought of it...

LYDIA (*cue from "grocery story"*). Now don't start staring at me when you mention that place. I never wanted to go there in the first place, if you just think back. I mean, I'm not mentioning any names, but all I can say is I never went there myself, mainly because it's so high-priced. Why, I'm sure there must be plenty of other stores that would bend over backwards to get our business, places that are a lot cleaner too, you can just bet. Why, they even have a news program that looks into places like that, places that aren't up to health standards. Especially all those fast food places, which I wouldn't get caught dead in.

MAGGIE. Oh, I don't think those places are all that bad. Lydia does all the cooking around here. You know it wouldn't hurt you to live and let live, lower your standards a little. We ain't living in the dark ages, for heaven's sake, and besides they got cooks in those places that specialize in that kind of cooking. Saves time, if you ask me, and they got two or three that ain't more than four or five blocks away. One of them run by Olaf Johanssen's boy, Smiley.

DORA (*cue from "all that bad"*). What're you talking about, Maggie? There ain't no telling what they put in the food there. You remember that story about Matt Frobisher finding part of a hairnet in a hamburger once and to this day he won't have a sandwich without he pokes it to pieces with a

fork. Hairnet, do you believe that? And she wants us to eat there.

LYDIA (*cue from "talking about, Maggie?"*). It's not just Crisco, either. I swear, it seems like we run out of everything at the same time. I was looking for a jar of olives this morning I *know* was there yesterday, back of the cupboard and, sure enough, it was nowhere to be found. Oh, there was a vacant spot where it *used* to be so I know I didn't imagine it. I've heard that enough times from you two to last me a lifetime and it just about already has, too.

DORA. I wouldn't trade with Smiley Johanssen if my life depended on it. You know how he got that nickname, don't you? He ain't got no teeth. Not one in his whole blessed mouth! Every time I see him I just hope and pray I don't say nothing funny and see that toothless grin of his. Reminds me of that trip to Carlsbad Caverns we took when we was kids.

MAGGIE (*cue from "Smiley Johanssen"*). Oh, but he's such a sweet boy and had the hardest kind of life, what with his daddy being a drunkard and all. Heck, the boy had to go to work to support his mama and those five sisters of his, none of which is married to this day. 'Course, they're as ugly as the back of a mud fence. He must have the faith of Job to keep up like he has.

LYDIA (*cue from "Smiley Johanssen"*). Oh, you never have forgiven the whole Johanssen family for that Halloween when all the girls dressed up as witches and you thought they'd carried off our cat for some sort of sacrifice when all the time that old Tom had run off under the depot and Papa had to crawl around in all that coal to get him out. That cat wasn't worth it after all, never caught mouse one.

DORA. Don't go talking to me about no worthless Tom when you was all the time raising squirrels.

LYDIA. I wasn't raising squirrels, I was just feeding them whenever they came into the yard. It's because of all those big elm trees out in the front. Squirrels naturally get drawn to trees like that because they know it's a good place to raise their babies.

DORA. Uh huh, and then you got *more* squirrels, and none of them worth a damn!

MAGGIE (*cue from "worthless Tom"*). We didn't call that cat "Tom." Oh, I guess it was a Tom cat but seems to me we gave it a name outta the Bible, like Joshua or Luke. No, that's not it. It had something to do with the thing being different colors, kinda motley like. And seems to me that Mama thought it reminded her of some parable or something, some story or other. Only for the life of me I can't exactly remember what...

DORA. Joseph, we named the cat Joseph. You know, the man with the coat of many colors, that's what Mama was talking about. (*The phone rings, causing the LADIES to stop yammering and look at it.*)

LYDIA. Well, wonder who that is?

MAGGIE. I ain't expecting anybody. You?

DORA. I bet if we picked it up, they'd tell us. (*She rises and crosses to the phone.*)

LYDIA. Has the mail been here yet? I been expecting the new Sears catalogue and this year, mark my words, I'm going to order a new house robe. Mine is just about in tatters.

MAGGIE (*cue from "been here yet"*). Now, I don't know if the mail's been here yet. Am I the only one who can get up and trot out to the mailbox to check? Your legs ain't broken.

DORA (*picks up phone, cautiously*). Hello?



MAGGIE. You'd think that nobody ever had checked the mailbox. I get the mail my share of times, far more than you, for sure. Four times last week Dora left it up to me to get the mail. I swear, I'd think you was afraid of something.

LYDIA (*cue from "checked the mailbox"*). No, you was just accusing me of never getting the mail, Maggie, I know *exactly* what you meant. And I don't see what the big deal is, we never get much of anything anyway. What're you expecting?

DORA (*finger in one ear*). What?

MAGGIE and LYDIA. Who is it?

DORA. Well, I don't know! I can't hear nothing with you two babbling like crows in a cornfield. (*Back to the receiver.*) What?

LYDIA. Tell *me* I'm babbling like a crow, she's sure one to talk. I never heard the like.

MAGGIE (*same time as LYDIA*). I can't believe she said that to her own sister. You'd think we was a bunch of loons or something.

DORA (*brings an arm down to indicate they shut up*). Hey! You two get worse everyday, I swear! Jabber, jabber, jabber like a flock of old hens. I never heard such clucking outside of a barnyard. You two are going to be the death of me yet, you hear me? I can only take so much and I'm just before going over the brim but mark my words if I go I'm taking you two with me, you understand what I'm saying? Now just hush and let me see what the man on the other end of this call is trying to tell me! (*Back to the receiver.*) Now what? (*She looks at the phone.*) He hung up. (*She tries to put the receiver back on the cradle but misses it.*)

MAGGIE. Maybe it was Doc. (*She crosses and looks out a window.*)

DORA (*moves to LYDIA*). You expecting a call from Doc?

LYDIA (*same time as DORA*). Is he supposed to come by today?

MAGGIE. Yes.

DORA. Who you answering?

MAGGIE. I don't remember. Anyway, he said something about bringing something over.

DORA. Bringing something over? What? (*To herself.*) Like you'd remember that.

LYDIA (*crosses to U door*). Lands, if he's coming over we ought to have something for him to drink.

DORA. There's plenty of iced tea in the 'frigerator.

MAGGIE (*moves to DORA*). Yeah, but how long has that been in there?

DORA. I made it fresh this morning. Drank some when I was having those olives.

LYDIA. I *knew* we had olives. Look at me like *I'm* crazy.

DORA. I look at you just like always, like I look at Maggie.

LYDIA. What a terrible thing to say.

DORA. What is wrong with you?

MAGGIE. Is that why Doc's coming over?

LYDIA. If he was coming over to see me, would he tell you that?

MAGGIE. Sure, he probably wants to sneak up on you.

LYDIA. Lands, you make me sound like an old Indian. What do you mean, "sneak up on me"?

DORA. He's *always* coming over to see you.

MAGGIE. I don't mean sneak. You know how he is when he's got something to tell us he thinks we might not want to hear but he knows it's gonna be for our own good anyway whether we like it or not so he's real cautious about bringing it up in the first place? (*DORA and LYDIA stare at MAGGIE.*)

DORA (to LYDIA). You're the retired English teacher, diagram that one.

LYDIA. She gets that from Uncle Lige, nobody understood a word he ever said either.

DORA. Remember his will?

LYDIA (nods). Twenty-six pages and at the end of it we got three cemetery plots and a cat.

MAGGIE. Named Tom.

DORA. Joshua, the cat was named Joshua!

MAGGIE. That was another cat.

DORA. I can't keep them apart, I was too busy dodging them squirrels. (*The doorbell sounds.*)

LYDIA. Well, there he is now. (*Crosses to door.*) I'll get it.

DORA (*sits in a chair*). Make sure who it is this time. Remember last week you let in those Jehovah's Witnesses?

MAGGIE. I thought they were very nice people.

DORA. They're *very* nice people, shut up.

(*LYDIA opens the door and DOC greets her.*)

DOC. Afternoon, Mrs. Van Horn.

LYDIA. Now, Arnold, I told you to call me Lydia. I'm not your teacher anymore.

DOC. Oh, now I wouldn't say that. Every time I come over here I learn something new. 'Course I have to listen *real* close.

LYDIA (*correcting him*). Very closely.

DORA. Will you let the man in before the squirrels get him!

LYDIA. Oh, where are my manners? Please. (*She allows DOC into the room.*)

DOC. Good afternoon, Dora. Maggie.

MAGGIE. Isn't it a lovely day?

DORA (nods). Doc.

MAGGIE. I can smell autumn just around the corner. (*She moves to the window.*) Cool mornings put me in a frame of mind, autumn frame of mind, sort of. Crisp but not too cold. And the leaves are just...

DORA (*bluntly jumping in*). What do you want, Doc?

DOC. Are you taking your pills?

DORA. Is *that* what you came traipsing all the way over here for?

DOC (*sees the phone off the hook*). No, not entirely, just mixing business with...(*He looks at the other LADIES.*)...business. Anybody been by here today? Any calls? (*He hangs up the phone.*)

DORA. We ain't your answering service.

MAGGIE (*hurt*). I was talking about autumn, I had such a nice feeling too, like I was remembering something sweet. Now it's gone, are you satisfied?

LYDIA. We *did* have a phone call a minute ago.

DOC (*anxiously*). Who was it? (*The LADIES look blankly at each other.*)

LYDIA. We don't really know.

DORA. If these two would stop jabbering long enough to hear something we might've.

DOC (*knowingly*). They hung up, didn't they.

LYDIA. Well...

DORA. 'Course they hung up. Probably had a low threshold of pain. Human ear can only take so much. I swear sometimes you can't hear yourself think around this place. It's worse than Grand Central Station, all the noise and grumbling, you'd think we didn't have nothing else better to do.

MAGGIE (*cue from "take so much"*). Now don't you go trying to get us all upset again. Here I was, having a nice afternoon and you have to go and say something like that. You get that from Papa, you know.

LYDIA (*cue from "take so much"*). Well, it's not like we don't have ears too and you can talk a blue streak just like anybody else. Why, I've heard you babbling like a brook over nothing, gossip and that's all, to any and all who'll listen.

DOC (*jumps in*). Hey, hey, HEY! (*The LADIES grow quiet.*)  
Lord, did I take *my* pills this morning?

LYDIA. Physician, heal thyself.

DOC. Look, you remember last week you were all talking about renting out that room upstairs? (*Looks at MAGGIE.*)

DORA. Don't look at her, she won't remember anything.

MAGGIE. Yes, I do. We were talking about renting out that room upstairs. Last week, it was.

LYDIA. It's okay, Maggie. Don't let Dora get you upset.

MAGGIE. Doesn't it feel like autumn to you?

LYDIA. Yes, it does. Sweet and crisp, like you said.

DORA. What, get her upset? It *is* autumn!

MAGGIE (*crosses to DORA*). I didn't say it *wasn't* autumn, did I? I said it *felt* like autumn. You can have autumn without it feeling like autumn, you know.

DORA. Where *are* my pills, anyway? (*She looks in a table drawer.*)

MAGGIE. Sometimes it feels like summer, sometimes it feels like winter!

LYDIA. What about spring?

MAGGIE (*nods*). Sometimes it feels like spring! Today...it felt like *autumn!* (*She sits abruptly on the sofa.*)

DORA. Now that we've had the weather report...(*She turns to DOC.*)...what about that room?

DOC. Well, I have just the person to rent it. And she can help me out at the same time. And you, too, if you'll let her. (*To himself.*) Although I don't know if I want to do this to her.

LYDIA. Who is she?

DOC. Her name is Jean Mitchell and she's a nurse. (*He winces.*)

LYDIA. Isn't that nice, a career woman. A nurse. Isn't that nice, Maggie?

MAGGIE (*still glaring*). How anybody can be in a foul humor on such a fine autumn day...

DORA (*moves to DOC*). Nurse?!

DOC (*moves back a step*). Uh oh.

DORA. You want us to have a live-in nurse now? We that old?

DOC. You wanted to rent that room and she was looking for a place to stay. And there are times when it might be handy to have someone here...

DORA (*interrupting him*). Who can take care of a bunch of decrepit old ladies and get us out of your hair?

DOC. I don't *have* all that much hair anymore, Dora. I used to. People used to compliment me on it.

LYDIA (*now slightly hurt, moves to DOC*). Is that it, Arnold? You don't think we can take care of ourselves anymore?

DOC. No, Mrs. Van Horn, it's just that...

DORA. That's *exactly* it. Well, I won't have it. I can still think, you know, I can still function! And I know I am *not* ready to be taken care of, day and night, by a registered nurse.

DOC (*looks at LYDIA*). All I'm asking is that you meet her. Is that too much to ask for an old friend like me, a former student?

LYDIA. I don't know, Arnold. I...

DORA. When's she coming over here?

DOC. Now who said anything about her coming over, she's...(*The doorbell sounds.*) Well, she's here. (*He crosses to the door.*)

DORA. Hold it right there, Buster Brown. Just what have you told her about us?

DOC. Hardly anything, believe me! I figured it would work out better that way.

DORA. No sir! We're *not* going along with this, I can tell you that right now.

MAGGIE. Do you mind if we speak for ourselves? We live here too, you know.

LYDIA. Maggie's right. I think we *all* should have a say-so about it.

DOC. Thank you.

LYDIA. I don't want her here either.

DOC. Mrs. Van Horn, she...

LYDIA. Arnold Claude Lomax, I've known you since day one and you have that look about you.

DOC. What look?

LYDIA. You remember that time at school you poured a whole inkwell into my goldfish bowl? I had blue fish for a week. You had that same look and that's what gave you away.

DOC. That's called a bedside manner.

LYDIA. It's called lying, don't you sass me, young man.

DOC. Yes, ma'am. Uh...*(He pulls her to one side and whispers to her.)* It's just that lately I've been worried about Dora. And I can't be here every minute, you know that.

LYDIA. Dora? Well, we...

DOC. You have to think of your sister, you know how she is.

LYDIA *(turns to the others)*. Maybe we should meet her. *(The doorbell sounds again.)*

DORA. What did he say to you? *(DOC shoots LYDIA a look.)*

LYDIA. He said...he said the poor woman has nowhere else she can go.

DOC. There you are. *(He opens the door.)* Jean?