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No. 174.

WE DINE AT SEVEN

A Sketch for Two Ladies

BY

ANGELA CUDMORE and PETER DAVEY

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WE DINE AT SEVEN

Characters.

MILICENT A very smart woman.

JULIA. Another—only smarter if possible.

The action takes place at Milicent's Flat, Regent's Court Mansions, N. W.

The time is 6.30 P. M., during the winter season.

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West.

PROPS FOR "WE DINE AT SEVEN."

The scene represents the sitting-room of a smart West End Flat, thoroughly comfortable and well furnished.

Doors R.—Leading to Kitchen.

L.—Leading to Bedroom.

L. C.—To passage showing the front door through the lobby.

Fireplace down stage L.

Dining Table L. C.

Arm-chair by fire L.

Sideboard R. C. with as many drawers, etc., as possible.

Sofa up stage R.

Chairs—Occasional Tables—Ornaments etc., about the room.

SMALL PROPERTIES.

Off R.— Poster (Suffragette Meeting.)

Shovel.

Dirty Table-cloth.

Pail.

Gridiron.

Cullender.

Large Spoon.

Saucepan.

Potatoes in large basket.

Frying-pan with cutlets.

Oysters in barrel.

Plenty of knives and forks.
Aspic mould and jug to pour liquid into.
Pudding basin.
Pastry board—Dough—Rolling pin, etc.
Jam jar with pickled cabbage in it.

Off L.— Lighted bedroom candle.

On stage—Book for Milicent.

Flower vases, books, magazines, etc., on
the centre table—all on a cloth which
Milicent picks up.

Tablecloth in sideboard drawer.

Cruets—Glass, etc., in sideboard.

Salver on sideboard.

Hammer in sideboard drawer.

Ornaments on mantelpiece

Box of matches on mantelpiece.

Pictures—Plates, etc., on the wall on trick
lines (if possible) all to fall at the
explosion.

WE DINE AT SEVEN.

(MILICENT DISCOVERED *reading by fire* L. *Door-bell rings.* MILICENT *goes on reading.* *Door-bell rings again harder.* MILICENT *goes on reading, looking round impatiently.* *Knocker and bell.*

MILICENT. How slow those servants are !

(*Knocker and bell again.*)

MILICENT (*rises, throws down book, and crosses to door* R. *Calling off* R.). Parker, Parker ! Why, don't you open the door ? (*No reply.*) Parker ! Parker ! Where can the girl have got to ? Parker ! Cook, Cook——

(*Knocking and ringing still harder.*)

MILICENT. This is really most mysterious. What's happened to the people ? I suppose I must open the door myself. (*Crosses to L. c., opens door and passes into the lobby. She speaks off.*) Julia, I really must apologize for keeping you waiting like this. Goodness knows what's become of the servants. (*Re-enters, L. c., followed by* JULIA.) It's awfully good of you to come—I was so afraid you might be out of town.

JULIA. Why, what's up, Milicent ?

MILICENT. *He's* coming to dinner.

JULIA. He ! Who ?

MILICENT. My dear, I thought you would have guessed. Mr. Joyce——

JULIA. What, that dear thing we met at the Hannans' ? Oh, Milicent——

MILICENT. He's passing through town—he wrote and suggested we should do a dinner and a theatre—rather sweet of him wasn't it?—he wanted me to meet him at the Carlton, but, somehow I didn't think I could quite do that—it wouldn't have been quite——

JULIA. Well, not quite——

MILICENT. I thought he might just as well dine here—and you see, dear, I couldn't receive him all alone in the flat,—how could I, dear? so I thought you would be most awfully sweet and not mind running in and being number three.

JULIA. Mind, why should I?

MILICENT. I've ordered a regular man's dinner—just oysters, a little clear soup, an aspic, lamb cutlets and a jam roley-poley. I know if there's one thing a man likes more than another its jam roley-poley. Why, bless me, it's half-past six and I said we dine at seven. Trot and take off your hat and cloak, dear. I wonder why Parker hasn't laid the cloth.

[JULIA exits L.]

(MILICENT rings bell. Pause. Then rings it again very impatiently.)

(JULIA re-enters L., with her cloak off.)

MILICENT. I cannot think what's happened to the servants this evening. (*Rings bell again.*) It's most extraordinary, Julia, they don't seem to take the least notice of bells. (*Rings bell again. Crosses to door R., and calls off.*) Parker, Parker! (*No reply.*) Julia, what can have happened?

JULIA. If I were you, I should go and see, dear.

(MILICENT exits R.)

MILICENT (*off R.*). Julia, there's no sign of anyone in the kitchen. (MILICENT re-enters R.) What can this mean? I do believe they're out.

JULIA. They can't be. They know you dine at seven.

MILICENT. Yes, that's just the awful part of it. Julia, I shall get hysterical, I know I shall.

JULIA. Let me see if I can solve the mystery.

[JULIA exits R.

MILICENT. (*very hysterical*). Oh, what is to be done?

(JULIA re-enters, carrying large poster.)

JULIA. Milicent, look!

(JULIA holds up poster.)

SUFFRAGETTE MEETING!

DOMESTIC SERVANTS SPECIALLY INVITED.

MRS. BLANKHURST

Will address the

Meeting at

7 : 30.

MILICENT. Good heavens! What am I to do? Mr. Joyce will be here at seven. Julia, why don't you say something? Julia, for goodness' sake, say something. What am I to do?

JULIA. It's pretty awful, isn't it?

MILICENT. Awful? Julia, it's a calamity! Do you hear me, it's a calamity! What is to be done?

JULIA. I suppose these charming servants of yours will condescend to be home before dinner time.

MILICENT. Not they. Mrs. Blankhurst does not speak till 7:30, and we dine at seven. Julia, I'm getting hysterical.

JULIA. Don't be foolish, let's have a good long think. (JULIA walks about. MILICENT sits by fire absolutely disconsolate.)

MILICENT. What will Mr. Joyce say?

JULIA. Now, Milicent, do pull yourself together. We must get on with the dinner, that's all. Can you cook?

MILICENT. Heavens, no! I haven't the very slightest idea about cooking.

JULIA. Well, thank goodness, I've not attended

cooking classes for nothing. You must lay the cloth and I'll start the dinner. [JULIA exits R.]

(MILICENT opens every drawer trying to find tablecloth --She finds it--and then looks in a helpless way at the flowers, magazines, etc., on table.)

MILICENT. Oh, one hasn't time to be fussy.

(MILICENT picks up the cloth on table rolling all its contents in it and throws it into arm-chair L.)

JULIA (at door R.). Milicent, the fire's nearly out. Where do you keep the coal?

MILICENT. In the coal box.

JULIA. I can't see it.

MILICENT. I'll come and get some.

(MILICENT exits R. JULIA enters R.)

JULIA. I shall make my frock in an awful mess. (Takes cloth off table and pins it round her)

MILICENT (off R.). Here are the coals! (Great noise of shoveling coals off R.)

JULIA. That's right, we shall get on now. [Exit R.]

(MILICENT enters R.)

MILICENT. This is too dreadful for words. Where is that tablecloth? (Looking about for cloth)

(Great noise of coals being put on the fire.)

JULIA (off R.). Milicent, this stove is making such a funny noise.

MILICENT. Pull out the damper, dear.

JULIA (off R.). Which one?

MILICENT. Oh, anyone you like—all of them—where is that tablecloth? (Turning everything upside down to find cloth)

MILICENT. Julia, do you hear—I can't find the tablecloth.

(JULIA *appears at door R.—the cloth round her all over soot.*)

JULIA. What are you talking about?

MILICENT. I tell you, I can't find the tablecloth.

JULIA. You really mustn't take me away from my cooking like this.

MILICENT. What is that you have round you?

JULIA. This? Oh——

MILICENT. It's the tablecloth—Julia, how can you? It's really too bad of you.

JULIA. I can't make my new dress dirty.

MILICENT. Well, take anything—here, this will do.

(MILICENT *picks the tablecloth out of the armchair, L. scattering the books, flowers, etc., all over the place. She throws the tablecover to JULIA.*)

JULIA. Oh, take your beastly cloth. (*Throws cloth on table and pins on tablecover*)

(MILICENT *lays cloth dirty side up.*)

MILICENT. Oh, this will never do! (*Turns cloth over and commences to lay it*)

[JULIA *exits R.*

(MILICENT *tries to lay the table, continually shifting everything about.*)

MILICENT. Oh, dear! I thought it was the simplest thing in the world to lay a cloth.

(*Opens all the drawers to find the table things. Leaves all drawers open, making the room in absolute disorder.*)

JULIA (*at door R., her dress tucked up*). Milicent, it's really too bad of you not to come and help me. I don't know where the things are kept.

MILICENT. You simply mustn't bother me. I'm too busy.

(JULIA *goes back into kitchen.*)

JULIA (*turning off R.*). I can't find the salt, and if I can't find the salt, how on earth do you suppose I can get on with the soup?

MILICENT. Oh, it is too trying! Here, let me come. [*Exit R.*]

(JULIA *enters R., carrying a saucepan.*)

JULIA. I don't know how I'm supposed to find places for all the things on the one muddling little stove—the hot plates seem to take up so much room. (*Puts saucepan on fire L.*)

(MILICENT *enters R., her hands full of spoons and forks.*)

JULIA, *going off R., collides with her—everything falls.*)

MILICENT. Julia, how can you? I call it most unfriendly of you to delay me like this. (*Picks up things and proceeds to lay cloth*)

JULIA (*off R.*). Milicent, I am sure there is something wrong with this stove.

MILICENT. Pull out some more dampers.

(*Great noise of dampers off.*)

JULIA (*at door R.*). That seems to make it worse.

MILICENT. Very well, then, shut up a few. Now, let me see—knives on the right—forks on the left—where does that girl keep the knives?

(*Turning out more drawers.*)

(JULIA *rushes in R. carrying a basket of potatoes.*)

(*She drops the basket of potatoes in the centre of the stage.*)

JULIA. Heavens! there's a black beetle.

(*They both jump on chairs holding up their skirts.*)

TOGETHER. Where—where—

JULIA. Oh! this is getting beyond a joke.

MILICENT (*still on chair*). Do be reasonable—is it my fault?

JULIA. Oh, I suppose we've got to go through with it—you'd better skin the potatoes.

MILICENT. You seem to expect me to do everything.

(JULIA goes off R.)

JULIA (*going off*). Keep an eye on the soup.

MILICENT. I've got my eye on it.

JULIA. Well, stir it—do do *something*.

(MILICENT to fire, stirs soup—turns saucepan over.)

MILICENT. Julia, Julia, for goodness' sake come and help me!

(JULIA enters R. Rushes across the room to fire, as she does so, she catches the tablecloth and pulls everything to the ground.)

MILICENT. Oh, Julia, Julia! What have you done? Oh!—Oh!—

(MILICENT falls into chair and breaks into screaming hysterics.)

JULIA. Here, pull yourself together.

(MILICENT worse.)

JULIA. Shut up! Do you hear me, shut up!
(Soundly shakes MILICENT) Will you be quiet!

MILICENT (*sobbing*). Oh, you're positively brutal to me!

JULIA. Look at the mess you've made of the soup—after all the trouble I've taken over it.

MILICENT. Oh, what are we to do? Oh, what are we to do?

JULIA. Do? Go without soup, I suppose. (*Bounces off R.*)

(MILICENT picks up things and re-lays cloth.)

MILICENT. There, I think that's pretty right—now I must get the glasses—where does that wretched girl keep the tray. (*Looks about for tray, upsetting all the furniture. Electric light begins to flicker*)

JULIA (*off R.*) Milicent, what's wrong with the light?

MILICENT. Oh, don't bother me, I don't know!

JULIA (*at door R.*). There must be something wrong with it—it's jumping about all over the place.

MILICENT. Now, let me see—we shall want tumblers, champagne glasses and claret glasses.

(*Electric light flickers badly.*)

MILICENT. Bless the light—there is something wrong. (*Calls off*) Julia, it's the main switch, I suppose—turn it on more, or turn it round—or do something—you'll find it under the kitchen dresser.

(MILICENT *exits R. carrying tray. Light goes out entirely. Both scream. Terrific smash of glass off R.*)

(*Enter MILICENT and JULIA groping about in the dark.*)

MILICENT. Oh dear! Oh dear! You are simply senseless, Julia. Thanks to your muddling about with the switch, you've made me smash all the glass.

JULIA. That's right, blame me for the precious electric light going wrong—this is all the thanks I get—why on earth don't you do something—find a match.

(*Both grope about looking for matches—upsetting flowers, vases, ornaments, etc., as they do so.*)

JULIA. Here, I've found one—now get a candle.

MILICENT. There's not such a thing in the flat.

JULIA. Not got a candle! Well, perhaps you'll tell me what to do.

MILICENT. I'm getting hysterical again.

JULIA. Don't be a fool.

MILICENT. How dare you call me a fool?

JULIA. How dare you drag me into all this muddle?

MILICENT. You know how anxious I am that Mr. Joyce should find everything all right.

JULIA. Bother Mr. Joyce!

MILICENT. Julia, you're brutal. I believe you're jealous.

JULIA. Jealous! Jealous of who?

MILICENT. Jealous of Mr. Joyce.

JULIA. Oh, am I, indeed! Well, perhaps your wonderful Mr. Joyce is not such a paragon as you take him for, I could tell you something——

MILICENT. Julia, how dare you——

JULIA. Perhaps if I told you all that Mr. Joyce said to me in the conservatory on the night of the County Ball——

(MILICENT goes into screaming hysterics. JULIA shakes her soundly.)

JULIA. Will you tell me where I can find a candle?

MILICENT (*very faintly*). There's one on the table by my bed.

(JULIA exits L. and returns with lighted candle.)

JULIA. Now, I'll get on with the dinner.

(JULIA going off R. carrying candle.)

MILICENT. Julia, how can you? It's no use leaving me in the dark. How can I see to lay the cloth in the dark?

JULIA. Well, how can I see to cook the cutlets?

MILICENT. You must bring the cutlets in here.

(JULIA enters R. carrying candle in one hand, the frying-pan in the other. She crosses to fire L.)

JULIA. It's rather difficult to keep one's temper! Milicent, I'm sure it can't be right—that kitchen stove is red hot.

MILICENT. I suppose you realize that Mr. Joyce will be here in ten minutes and that you have simply nothing ready.

JULIA. I have nothing ready! I like that. I should like to know what you've done, except upset the soup. Why don't you open the oysters?

(MILICENT takes candle and goes off R.)

JULIA. Here, don't leave me in the dark!

MILICENT (*off R.*). Julia, you simple idiot—if you

had any eyes, you would have seen this shilling in the slot thing had run out.

JULIA. Well, put another shilling in.

(MILICENT *enters R.*)

MILICENT. I've no change—lend me a shilling.

JULIA. It's no good asking me, I never carry any money about.

MILICENT, Well, what am I to do?

JULIA. Borrow one——

MILICENT. Who of? Do you suppose I can put my head out of the window and scream for a policeman to come up and lend me a bob?

JULIA. Happy thought, try a button.

MILICENT. I haven't got one.

JULIA. Rot. Cut one off somewhere.

MILICENT. I suppose I must.

[*Exit.*

MILICENT (*speaking off*). I've cut one off.

JULIA. Well, put it in the slot.

MILICENT (*off*). It doesn't seem very honest. It's too big.

JULIA. Poke.

MILICENT (*off*). I am poking.

(*Lights go up suddenly. MILICENT enters R., carrying oysters.*)

MILICENT. There, that's splendid, now we shall get along capitally. How are the cutlets going?

JULIA. Ripping.

MILICENT. Well, things might be worse. We'll have to do without soup, but if we have the oysters and the aspic and the cutlets and the pudding I dare say Mr. Joyce will quite appreciate it; get the aspic, there's a dear——

[JULIA *exits R.*

(MILICENT *busy with the oysters.*)

JULIA (*off R.*). I can't get the aspic out of the mould.

MILICENT. I think it's usually done with boiling water.

JULIA. Right, O!

(*Enter, R., JULIA pouring liquid from mould into basin.*)

JULIA. Oh! do look, Milicent—

MILICENT. What have you done? You've melted it—

JULIA. I've a brainwave. Do you think it will do for soup?

MILICENT. Julia, how can you! what would Mr. Joyce think?

JULIA. Oh! What about the pudding?

MILICENT. Haven't you made it?

JULIA. Made it? Of course I haven't made it!

MILICENT. Well, what on earth have you been doing, muddling about in the kitchen all this time?

JULIA. Oh, Milicent, you are most ungrateful. I am sure I am doing everything in my power to help you.

MILICENT. Well, dear, do—do, there's a dear, get on with the pudding.

JULIA. I can't possibly leave the cutlets.

MILICENT. Well, bring the pudding things in here and make it while I open the oysters.

(*MILICENT trying to open oyster with fork.*)

MILICENT. Oh, I can't open this precious thing. I'll try a hair-pin.

(*The room getting in worse and worse disorder.*)

(*JULIA enters R., carrying pastry board and dough which she puts down on dinner table.*)

MILICENT. Take the things off the table—you're upsetting it all.

JULIA. Perhaps you'll tell me where I am to put it.

MILICENT. On the floor.

JULIA. Well, will you kindly move the potatoes?

(*MILICENT picks up basket of potatoes and puts it on the*

arm-chair L. JULIA kneels down and rolls pastry on the floor. MILICENT struggling with oyster. JULIA rises and crosses off R.)

JULIA (*at door R.*). Milicent, where do you keep the jam?

MILICENT. These oysters are positively heartless.

JULIA. Milicent, where is the jam?

MILICENT. Oh, bother, anywhere, try the top shelf in the cupboard.

(*JULIA enters with big pot of jam. MILICENT still struggling with oyster. JULIA busy on floor at pastry. Fearful noise off R.*).

TOGETHER. What's that——

(*MILICENT drops oyster. JULIA drops jam. They both rush over and peep into kitchen.*)

JULIA. It's that stove, there is something horribly wrong with it.

MILICENT. Well, we haven't time to bother about that now. Do please get on with the pudding. This oyster will make me hysterical in a moment, it is most unreasonable of it, it positively refuses to open. Julia, how do you open oysters?

JULIA. Here let me have a try, we shall never be ready, you come and put the jam in the pudding.

(*They change over. JULIA trying at the oyster. MILICENT making an awful mess of the pudding.*)

(*MILICENT picks up jar and smells it, and then pulls out handful of Pickled Cabbage.*)

MILICENT. Julia, you inconceivable idiot!

JULIA. Thanks.

MILICENT. I suppose you realize that you are making jam Roley Poley with Pickled Cabbage. What a horrible smell of burning.

JULIA. Heavens, it's the cutlets! (*Throws down oysters and rushes to fire*) They are burnt to a cinder! It's all your fault, making me go and dance about that pudding.

MILICENT. Oh, of course it's my fault! I suppose it's my fault the servants have walked off. I suppose this suffragette twaddle is my fault. I suppose this precious Mrs. Blankhurst is my fault. I suppose it's my fault that this bothering man is coming to dinner. I suppose it's my fault that it's three minutes to seven. I am sure Mr. Joyce——

JULIA. Oh, confound Mr. Joyce!

MILICENT. Julia!——

JULIA. I say it again, confound Mr. Joyce!

MILICENT. How dare you abuse Mr. Joyce?

JULIA. Bother, confound and drat Mr. Joyce!

(MILICENT *breaks into violent hysterics. She throws herself into armchair, landing on the potatoes. She screams, gets up, sweeps the potatoes all over the floor and collapses into the chair.*)

JULIA. Milicent! do, do stop——

(MILICENT *worse.*)

JULIA. Milicent, if the beastly man is coming, we must give him something to eat—the soup is gone—the aspic is melted—the cutlets are hopeless—so he will have to satisfy himself with the oysters and the pudding. Do let us get on with them.

(JULIA *goes down on her knees working at the pudding.*

MILICENT *takes up the oysters.*)

MILICENT. I can't open the wretched thing—I'll get a hammer.

(*Another search, upsetting all the place looking for a hammer. The room, by this time, is in the utmost disorder. MILICENT finds hammer in drawer and tries to open oyster with it on the table. The oyster slips about.*)

MILICENT. Julia, if you had a grain of kindness or consideration in you, you would come and hold this wretched oyster. How can I possibly open it while it wobbles about all over the place like this?

(JULIA has her hands all over dough, she crosses.)

JULIA. Here, you don't understand carpentering a bit, you hold the oyster, and let me have a try.

(MILICENT holds oyster, JULIA gets it into position and gives a vigorous blow. MILICENT'S hand slips and she receives the full force of the hammer on her hand. She screams with pain.)

MILICENT. Oh, Julia! You brute, you brute! you brute! You did that on purpose, I know you did— Oh! Oh! Oh!——

(Clock strikes seven. A loud knock and ringing at front door.)

MILICENT. There's Mr. Joyce!

(A fearful noise off R.)

JULIA. The stove——

(Terrific explosion R. Both ladies thrown down—MILICENT across table, JULIA on to sofa.)

(Trick scenery: props work at this, making a scene of absolute chaos and havoc.)

CURTAIN.

(Second picture. Ladies still prostrate. Door L. C. open and a very smart man in evening dress looking amazed at the hopeless scene of desolation.)



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