

# A SHORT STORY

by

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## Characters

Millie. Early 50's (and upward), married to Jim.

Jim. Mid to late 50's (and upward), married to Millie.

Del. Early 40's, married to Alice.

Alice. Late 30's, married to Del.

Miranda. 16 years old. Alice and Del's daughter.

The play is set in a college town in the early 1970's in the living room of Millie and Jim and the kitchen of Alice and Del, but also in hospital room, a field, the present moment and a bar in the distant past.

This play is dedicated to Mili and Jim, may they rest in peace, together.

And to Wesley, whom I loved.

Scene

Before dinner. Jim and Millie at home in their living room.

JIM. (swishing his glass, taking a sip) How's yours?

MILLIE. Perfection. And yours, Jim?

JIM. (shrugging) Eh.

(MILLIE gets up and tops his glass.)

MILLIE. Here you go.

(She sits back down.)

JIM. Why is it so hard, Mil?

MILLIE. What, Jim, life? Are we talking about life?

JIM. For me to get a perfect drink.

MILLIE. It's never perfect the first time around.

JIM. Yours was.

MILLIE. You're just fussy. You're a fussy guy.

JIM. (downing his, holding glass out) The second drink, on the other hand, is always perfect.

(MILLIE gets up, takes his glass, and makes him a second.)

(She sits. He drinks.)

I wonder why.

MILLIE. How was your class?

JIM. There is one excellent student.

MILLIE. There always is! How strange.

JIM. Very promising.

MILLIE. Never two.

JIM. Thank god.

MILLIE. Why's that?

JIM. Because, Millicent, my love. Love of my life. The good ones always come to a bad end.

MILLIE. Do they, really?

JIM. They get pregnant. Or they get a girl pregnant. Or they kill themselves.

MILLIE. How grim, Jim. Stop it. It's not always the case. It's not the rule.

JIM. Or they end up in a war.

MILLIE. Jim.

JIM. Missing in Action.

MILLIE. Come on. Enjoy your drink. Enjoy being home. Let the gin rush in and over you. Forget the day. Forget the war. Forget the past.

(pause)

JIM. He has violet eyes.

MILLIE. Jim?

JIM. I find it hard to look away.

MILLIE. Oh, dear.

JIM. So I don't.

MILLIE. Not again.

JIM. You asked me how my class went.

MILLIE. I did. You're right.

JIM. Do you want to know? Or was it purely form? A *performa* question?

I'm sorry. That wasn't nice. I'm not likeable, Millie. But neither are you.

MILLIE. That's not true. Del and Alice like us very much.

JIM. Says who?

MILLIE. They're coming over for dinner next week.

JIM. They tolerate us.

MILLIE. Del adores you. And your students do, too, whatever you may think of them.

JIM. I maintain that we are difficult, complicated creatures.

We're mannered and arch. We're bitchy and cruel. We have opinions and voice them forcefully.

MILLIE. Simplicity, it's true, has its beauty.

JIM. The simplicity of nature, for example.

MILLIE. But we're part of nature, Jim.

JIM. Not us, Mil. We are pure artifice.

(A pause, they enjoy.)

MILLIE. Speaking of Alice and Del.

JIM. Were we?

MILLIE. Why is Alice always hanging on Del? Why do you suppose? Why must women hang on men's arms? Do men like it?

JIM. How should I know?

MILLIE. It would slow you down, wouldn't it?

JIM. I should think so.

MILLIE. And men, hang their arms over their wives. Like heavy coats.

JIM. You're taller than I. It would never have worked.

I would have liked your arm around me.

MILLIE. You would've?

JIM. I'd have felt more protected from life's battles.

MILLIE. I've protected you! I mean, I've tried, god knows.

They lay their heads on their men's shoulders. I never understood that, Jim. Laying my head down on someone else. Like an act of submission.

JIM. I dunno. It might feel good.

(She moves to sit next to him. She takes his arm and rests her head on his shoulder. He deliberately and carefully puts his arm around her. They stay like this.)

JIM. How does it feel?

MILLIE. It . . . hurts my neck.

JIM. I think it feels good.

MILLIE. (pulling away) You do?

JIM. Sure, it makes me feel protective, powerful.

MILLIE. Let's try it the other way round!

(MILLIE puts her arm around JIM.)

Lay your head on my shoulder, dear.

That feels much better. How's it for you, Jim?

JIM. I'm ten again. Shielded under mother's arm. Dad's in a rage. He's tearing the house apart. The new drapes, put up with such care and fuss, down.

(He buries his face in her bosom, she holds him.)

MILLIE. I should have held you more.

(She drains her glass.)

Now that tastes like another.

TO READ THE WHOLE PLAY AND FOR ANY OTHER INQUIRES, PLEASE CONTACT  
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