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Dramatic Publishing

Flirting

With the
Deep End

Comedy by
Suzanne Maynard Miller



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Flirting

With the Deep End

Comedy. By Suzanne Maynard Miller.

Cast: 2m., 3w. Michael owns an independent bookstore that houses the world's worst book club. Aside from Michael himself, only two members remain: Gail, a neurotic librarian beset by relationship woes, and Diane, a shoot-from-the-hip waitress who offers no-nonsense advice to her self-absorbed friends. In an effort to put his struggling bookstore on the map, Michael has been vying for the attention of the local newspaper, and they're finally showing interest. As the featured club in a piece on the "book club boom," Michael's hoping his bookstore (and his ego) will garner a much needed boost. Seeing this as his last, best hope, Michael enlists the help of Elliott—a celebrity author in town to promote his latest best-seller—to ensure the evening's success. Unfortunately, Elliott proves a disastrous choice. Unbeknownst to Michael, aside from being Diane's estranged brother, Elliott has just broken Gail's heart and has his sites set on Michael's wife, Christine. Ignoring all red flags, Michael forges ahead—but his carefully choreographed evening of glory turns into a chaotic comedy of errors. This taut comedy about friendship, loyalty, and self-doubt will have you laughing even as you recognize some of the neuroses as your own! *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes.*

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By

SUZANNE MAYNARD MILLER



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(FLIRTING WITH THE DEEP END)

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FLIRTING WITH THE DEEP END

A Play in Two Acts
For 2m., 3w.

CHARACTERS:

MICHAEL late 30s; owns Michael's Books;
started the book club

GAIL mid- to late 30s; a librarian; in the book club

DIANE late 30s/early 40s; friend of Gail's;
in the book club

CHRISTINE mid-30s; Michael's wife;
wants to be in the book club

ELLIOT . . . late 30s; an imaging scientist; primarily works
on interpreting images from the Mars Global Surveyor;
Diane's brother

SETTING:

The present. A few wet days in March. A mid-sized city
somewhere in the United States.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(Thursday night. The bookstore. MICHAEL, DIANE and GAIL sit in chairs arranged in a semicircle. There are also several empty chairs, giving the room an empty feeling. To one side of the room there is a snack table. This is a book club meeting. MICHAEL is rehearsing a small speech.)

MICHAEL. Jack Hernandez has been writing poetry and short fiction for fifteen years. It is notable that this volume not only marks Mr. Hernandez's first published work, but also the inauguration of his own small press—PIGLET PROJECTS. Mr. Hernandez has dabbled in performance art—

GAIL. Don't say dabbled—

MICHAEL. What's wrong with dabbled?

GAIL. It's pejorative.

MICHAEL. OK. Mr. Hernandez has—has used performance art to—to spoon feed his stories to an audience who would rather not read...

GAIL. Michael—

MICHAEL. OK. He's used performance art as a way to bring his material to the stage. We are thrilled that he is

with us tonight to lead us in a discussion about his spicy new collection of stories: *Sucking on Pigs' Feet*. (Pause.)

DIANE. That's disgusting.

MICHAEL (*breaks from his speech and begins handing out manila envelopes*). You will find three notecards in here. Yellow, white and green. The green one is the most important.

GAIL (*to MICHAEL*). I don't think the questions should be scripted.

DIANE. What's with the title? That's my question.

MICHAEL (*to GAIL*). They won't be.

GAIL (*referring to the cards, to MICHAEL*). What do you mean they won't be? They are.

DIANE. *Sucking on Pigs' Feet*?

MICHAEL (*to GAIL*). We'll memorize them. Before tomorrow's meeting. They'll seem genuine. Be sure sure sure to ask the green questions first. The yellow ones are of secondary importance, and the white ones are optional. Only if we have time.

DIANE. And what's with the pig obsession?

MICHAEL (*finally dealing with DIANE*). It's short fiction, Diane.

DIANE (*to herself*). Oh, right. Short fiction.

GAIL. Our conversation will feel forced.

MICHAEL. It won't.

DIANE (*to herself, sarcastic*). That explains it.

MICHAEL (*to GAIL*). Look, I know how to handle these guys. You can't be slow or hesitant; they don't have time for that. You need to be organized, confident.

GAIL (*to MICHAEL*). It will be obvious. Our questions will feel stiff.

MICHAEL (*to GAIL*). No. Look, we'll practice making them real. Spontaneous. That's why we're rehearsing now.

GAIL. I don't like the title either.

DIANE. Thank you. It's stupid and disgusting.

GAIL. It's cutesy. That's the only reason he uses it.

MICHAEL. Can we please move past the title?

GAIL. It draws attention to the weakest story in the collection.

DIANE. Which one?

(There is a moment; MICHAEL and GAIL stare at her.)

MICHAEL. What do you mean, which one?

DIANE. Which story does it draw attention to?

MICHAEL. You haven't read it, have you?

DIANE. I read the back.

MICHAEL. For Christ's sake.

DIANE. I don't like to read.

MICHAEL. This is a book club, Diane. Reading is involved.

GAIL. Diane—

DIANE. So, if I'm going to have to start reading on some kind of forced schedule...

MICHAEL. That's the point.

DIANE. Books I've never even heard of...

MICHAEL. This is just occurring to you now? You've been coming for five months. *(There is silence.)* You mean to tell me that in all that time...

GAIL *(not looking at MICHAEL)*. Sometimes she rents the movie.

MICHAEL. What?

GAIL. Sometimes—

DIANE. If the movie's out, I rent it. If not, I rent something close.

MICHAEL. The movie's never out.

GAIL. Once. That Raymond Carver—

MICHAEL. Something close?

DIANE. Yeah, something with a similar title.

MICHAEL. Oh, this is too much.

DIANE. Like when we read *Eden's Gate*.

MICHAEL. Right?

DIANE. I rented *Heaven's Gate*.

MICHAEL. I can't—this is not—why do I bother? Why do you bother?

DIANE. I come for the food.

MICHAEL. You're a fraud.

DIANE. Oh, please.

MICHAEL. This is my store. I started this club. You should be thrown out for breach of— (*To GAIL.*)
You've known about this?

GAIL. Not always.

DIANE. You have, on more than one occasion, complimented me on my points. *Heaven's Gate*, for example—

MICHAEL. *Eden's Gate*.

DIANE. "Fascinating perspective, Diane, I hadn't thought of that."

MICHAEL. I didn't say that.

GAIL. You did.

MICHAEL. Whose side are you on?

GAIL. I think we should begin the discussion.

(There is a pause; GAIL and MICHAEL simultaneously look at their notecards.)

DIANE. I'll start. (*Turning the book over and looking at the back cover.*) I want to know about this picture. Isn't it supposed to be the author's picture here?

MICHAEL. Use the notecards, please.

GAIL. Well, it's his feet.

DIANE (*shaking her head in disappointment, referring to the book*). Where'd you find this guy?

MICHAEL. Can we please?

GAIL (*looking closer*). It must be a computer-generated image.

MICHAEL. Just use—

DIANE (*still looking at the picture*). Huh.

GAIL. A fusion of his feet with an actual pig's foot.

DIANE. Ew.

GAIL. Which he's sucking on.

(They all become distracted for a moment by the computer image. They look at it closely then pull it far away, turn it on its side, etc. DIANE gets up and goes to the snack table.)

MICHAEL (*breaking away from the book's back cover*).

We are supposed to be having an intelligent discussion about literature.

DIANE. Listen, I joined to meet men. (*She looks around.*)

Lotta good that did me.

MICHAEL. Yeah, well, we lost two good members because of you.

DIANE. They weren't my type.

MICHAEL. They were good members. Punctual, smart.

DIANE. Those guys were narrow-minded.

MICHAEL. Right, they wanted to talk about literature.

DIANE. They were upset by my selection.

MICHAEL. Your selection was erotica, Diane.

DIANE. At least it keeps your interest.

MICHAEL. The point is—when the paper comes tomorrow we need to look and act cutting edge.

DIANE. “Cutting edge book club takes city by storm.”

GAIL. Maybe the article should focus on your store.

MICHAEL. He wants to cover the book club...phenomenon. The whole experience. So let's show him how this club is really pushing the envelope of what it means to read!

GAIL. “Pushing the envelope of what it means to read”?
(*Pause.*)

DIANE. I'll bring the erotica.

SCENE 2

(*Late Thursday night. Scudder's, a bar.*)

DIANE. God, he bugs me sometimes.

GAIL. Who, Michael?

DIANE. Who else.

GAIL. He's just nervous. About tomorrow night.

DIANE. Don't make excuses for him.

GAIL. I'm not.

DIANE. You are, Gail. You always do.

GAIL. I make excuses for you, too.

DIANE. That's fine. I deserve excuses. (*They drink.*)

GAIL. Right. (*They drink. Then, GAIL conceding.*) You're right. (*GAIL finishes her drink, stands up, holds her nose, and lowers herself. She sits on the floor for a few*

moments and then rises up, opens her eyes, and breathes.)

DIANE. What was that?

GAIL. Japanese underwater meditation.

DIANE. No.

GAIL. Yes. Centers me when I'm on the edge. (*Closing her eyes and breathing.*) And I'm on the edge.

DIANE. But there's no water here.

GAIL. I usually do it at the pool.

DIANE. And what's this supposed to do?

GAIL. You hold your breath for as long as you can, and in that moment where you just don't think you can hold it for another second, you do. And that's the sacred moment.

DIANE. And?

GAIL. And what?

DIANE. What's the sacred moment tell you?

GAIL. Oh, right. Well, as you're about to pass out, you should see a color. Either a reddish purple, or a purplish red. And, depending on the color, you're either moving towards calm, or moving away from it.

DIANE. Which one's which?

GAIL. What?

DIANE. Which color means which thing?

GAIL (*a beat*). I can't remember. (*Pause, they drink.*)

DIANE. So...you still seeing the mystery man?

GAIL. Don't call him that.

DIANE. Well, you won't tell me his name. (*GAIL says nothing.*) Do you know his name?

GAIL. Of course.

DIANE. But you can't say it out loud.

GAIL. It's bad luck.

DIANE. Oh, please.

GAIL. We haven't passed the three-month mark yet. I don't want to jinx this one, Diane. I'm really falling for him.

DIANE. Impossible. If you're too afraid to say his name...

GAIL. Then what?

DIANE. Then it isn't love.

GAIL (*not listening*). You know what's great? He doesn't need me. He could take me or leave me. I'm completely superfluous.

DIANE (*sarcastically*). That is attractive.

GAIL. He discovers things.

DIANE. About you?

GAIL. About the universe.

DIANE. He treats you like a Sunday circular.

GAIL. I didn't say that.

DIANE. You said superfluous. The point is—you can't love someone for his big ideas.

GAIL. It's more than ideas. I find his profession sexy.

DIANE. That's even worse.

GAIL. You love ex-convicts.

DIANE. It's not the same.

GAIL. How's it different?

DIANE. I never know they're ex-cons beforehand. It just turns out that way.

GAIL. Oh.

DIANE. Anyway, I wouldn't call being a convict a profession.

GAIL. Good point.

DIANE. They all had different professions that got them to that, you know, level. So. (*Pause.*) What do you really know about this guy anyway?

GAIL. He's published a book. He's received several awards.

DIANE. Big deal.

GAIL. It *is* a big deal. He's really doing something. And I haven't met anyone in a couple of years, so I'd rather not knock him after three months.

DIANE. Don't then.

GAIL. He could be something good, you know? So just leave it alone.

DIANE. Fine.

GAIL. Let's not talk about him anymore.

DIANE. Great. (*Long pause.*)

GAIL. He's been traveling a lot.

DIANE. Gail—

GAIL. I don't know how you do it, anyway. Where do you meet all these guys? I never meet anyone.

DIANE. Yeah, well, that's cause you're too picky.

GAIL. Isn't there something in between?

DIANE. In between what?

GAIL. Too picky and not picky at all.

(*DIANE finishes her beer.*)

DIANE. Nope.

SCENE 3

(*Late Thursday night. MICHAEL and CHRISTINE's living room. MICHAEL comes in; CHRISTINE pokes her head up from the couch.*)

CHRISTINE. How was it?

MICHAEL. God, you scared me.

CHRISTINE. Sorry—

MICHAEL. Why are you up?

CHRISTINE. I was reading.

MICHAEL. Oh. (*He gives her a kiss.*)

CHRISTINE. How was the rehearsal?

MICHAEL. Fine. Fine. Awful, actually.

CHRISTINE. Huh. How many people?

MICHAEL. Are we going to have this discussion now?

CHRISTINE. We could. (*Pause.*)

MICHAEL. I think it's important. To maintain a little individual identity.

CHRISTINE. And this is how we do it? Joining different book clubs will preserve our individualism?

MICHAEL. It's late. Look, Chrissy, you don't want to join this club.

CHRISTINE. I think it would be fun. To be a part of—

MICHAEL (*pressing his fingers to his temples*). They gave me a migraine. With all the back and forth about *Sucking on Pigs' Feet*. (*Pause.*)

CHRISTINE. Was that the snack?

MICHAEL. It's the book we're reading.

CHRISTINE. Oh. (*MICHAEL glances at the clock and takes it off the wall.*) Do people like it?

MICHAEL. Well, Diane is subversive, and needs picture books, and Gail is—you know...

CHRISTINE. What?

MICHAEL (*tapping the clock*). I just changed the battery on this thing.

CHRISTINE. Gail is what?

MICHAEL. I don't know. You know...

CHRISTINE. I don't know. I've only met Diane.