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Dramatic Publishing

LITTLE OLD LADIES IN TENNIS SHOES

by

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The Dramatic Publishing Company

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(LITTLE OLD LADIES IN TENNIS SHOES)

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For my family, who are friends;
and for my friends, who are family:
“...we plan a little, we eat a little...”

Little Old Ladies in Tennis Shoes was first produced on November 11, 1985, by the Stamford Arts Council as part of the Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series. It was directed by Muriel Nussbaum and featured the following cast:

Kate Corrigan	Lydia Leeds
Molly Blumenthal	Muriel Nussbaum
Jeff Bernstein	Nick Meyer
Marsha Bernstein	Marla Sterling
Mrs. Petrelli	Rita Elliot
Mrs. Feldman	Connie Ilowitz
Mrs. Davis	Mary Dunn
Bill Clayton	Matt McQuail
David Bernstein	Jeff Schwartz

The development of the current script owes a great deal to this and subsequent productions by the Society Hill Playhouse, Philadelphia, and Theatre Americana, Altadena.

LITTLE OLD LADIES IN TENNIS SHOES

A Play in Two Acts
For Two Men and Six Women

CHARACTERS

- KATE CORRIGAN mid-30's, casually stylish
career woman
- MOLLY BLUMENTHAL 71, warm, but with a
sarcastic wit
- JEFF BERNSTEIN 11, gentle, sensitive
- MARSHA BERNSTEIN mid-40's, high-strung,
meticulous
- MRS. PETRELLI .. 60's, orange-red hair, good-humored
and with vestiges of the glitzy glamour of her youth
- MRS. FELDMAN elderly, matronly, a bit gloomy,
with an unhealthy interest in all things medical
- MRS. DAVIS elderly, nervous, shy
- BILL CLAYTON late 30 's, Kate's boss and
occasional lover, forbidden either to boss or to love her

TIME: The present

SETTING: One set,
the living room and kitchen of Kate's house

ACT ONE

SCENE: *Saturday afternoon, late January. Kate's house, an "older home" in a town that has become a suburb of the sprawling city. There is a small kitchen stage R; a living room takes up the rest of the stage. The front door is UC. UL is an archway leading to the stairs to the second floor. There is a curtained bay window in the left wall, with a wooden window seat beneath it. A sofa faces the audience at C. An easy chair R and a rocking chair L face each other across, and downstage of, the sofa. Coffee table, end tables, etc., are tasteful, eclectic. Cartons, books, lamps, and clothes are scattered everywhere.*

KATE enters through the front door, in coat, hat, gloves, and scarf, carrying a Mothers' March on Birth Defects packet and wearing a canvasser's identification tag. She puts down packet, takes off her gloves, blows on her hands, picks up packet, regards it pensively, then tosses it onto the sofa and crosses with a determined stride to the phone, which is on the floor near the kitchen. She dials. As she talks, she tinkers among the boxes and other debris, taking the phone along with her.

KATE (plucking off her I.D. tag as she talks, then squirming out of her hat, scarf, and coat and tossing them onto the easy chair). Marie? Hi. This is Kate. I'm fine. Yes, it's lovely. There's a lot of work to be done, but they

say with older homes, there always is. Listen, can I talk to Tim for just a second? Thanks. *(A pause, then she continues, with humor, but also with concern.)* Tim? What the hell did you sell me here? I was warned about underhanded real estate agents, but, Tim, I trusted you. You're my *brother*. What did you do? I'll tell you what you did. You sold me a house in a retirement village, that's what. There's nothing for miles around but old ladies. Didn't you realize that? How should I know how you could tell? Isn't that part of your job? You could have gone door-to-door collecting for the Mothers' March on Birth Defects like I just did. No, you do not have to be a mother to do it, Timothy. I tried that excuse. Anyway, it seemed like a good opportunity to meet my new neighbors. But all my new neighbors turned out to be *old*. There was an elderly widow behind every door, watery blue eyes peering past the chain as if I were the Grim Reaper. I'm telling you, Timothy, it was creepy. No, not as creepy as flashers in the hallway. No, they do not breed cats in their closets. As far as I can tell. But, Tim, it's still spooky. I don't fit in here. I'm a young woman. *(Pause.)* Thirty-six is not middle age. What do you mean, lower middle age? It's upper youth. *(Pause.)* Well, yes, there's one couple, but they've got a little old lady in there with them. Holding her captive, I think. She wanted to give to the Mothers' March, but they wouldn't let her. No. They kept saying they gave at the office and she kept saying *she* didn't have an office and she wanted to give for herself, and they wouldn't let her. It was very unpleasant. *(She finds an unidentifiable "green thing" in one of the boxes and examines it from various angles as she talks.)* Well, of

course, I don't want to move back to the city. I only wanted you to know what kind of bum deal you gave your own sister. I owe you one. So – when are you coming for dinner? (*Laughs.*) No, I won't poison you. I'll think of something more subtle. All right. Hi to the kids. Bye. Wait! Tim? Did one of your kids leave part of a toy at my place? Well... I'm not sure which part. It's kind of a green thing with other green things attached to it. No? Hmmm. Okay. Talk to you later. Bye. (*She hangs up, puts green thing on coffee table and continues rummaging through cartons. As she starts to carry one out the archway, the doorbell rings.*) Oh, wouldn't you know it?

(*Hesitating between bringing carton out or in, she finally brings it in, puts it down, and answers door. MOLLY and JEFF enter, bundled to the teeth against the cold.*)

KATE. Hello.

MOLLY. Hello. Again. I've brought you my contribution.

KATE. Oh, you're... ah...

MOLLY. They gave at the office.

KATE. Right. I thought so.

MOLLY (*indicating JEFF*). And this is son of they gave at the office.

JEFF (*offers KATE his hand*). I'm Jeff. Bernstein.

MOLLY. If they really did give at the office, which I doubt.

KATE (*shaking Jeff's hand*). I kind of guessed that. Hello, Jeff, I'm Kate. Kate Corrigan.

JEFF. Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Corrigan.

KATE. It's Ms. But just call me Kate. Unless you'd rather I call you Mr. Bernstein?

JEFF (*laughing*). No. I'll call you Kate.

KATE. Good. (*To MOLLY.*) And you must be Mrs. Bernstein.

MOLLY. No, I mustn't. I'm Mrs. Blumenthal. My daughter is Jeff's mother. Or so she tells me.

KATE (*laughs, not really sure she should*). I see. Well... may I take your coats? Can I get you something warm to drink?

MOLLY. Oh, no, don't trouble yourself.

KATE. It's no trouble, really. Would you like some coffee? (*To JEFF.*) Hot chocolate?

JEFF. Grandma?

MOLLY. Oh... I suppose. (*They begin to unbundle themselves, piling it all on a chair, for want of a better place.*)

KATE. One hot chocolate coming up. (*To MOLLY.*) And you?

MOLLY. Tea, if you have.

KATE. Tea it is. (*Starts toward kitchen, stops short.*) Oh. I forgot. I haven't found my pots yet. But I do have glasses. Anyone for milk?

MOLLY. No.

JEFF. No, thank you.

KATE. Water? I know where the sink is. (*MOLLY and JEFF shake their heads "no."*) Well. Won't you at least sit down for a while? You're my first guests in the new house. I should offer champagne... but I won't... because I don't have any. (*Flustered and perplexed.*) You know this really isn't at all like me. I'm usually very organized... (*She lets the thought drift off in her confusion.*)

JEFF (*noticing green thing, as he and MOLLY move to sofa to sit down*). What's that?

KATE. I haven't the slightest idea.

MOLLY. Where did it come from?

JEFF. Mars?

KATE. Could be. I found it in that box, with a bunch of other odds and ends.

JEFF (*picks up green thing and turns it at various angles*).

Is it a piece of something?

KATE. Possibly. But what? (*JEFF tries it on as a hat.*)
Definitely not that!

MOLLY. Did something break?

KATE. Not that I know of. I suppose the movers could have thrown it in by mistake.

JEFF. Maybe it's a statue. (*He sets it on the window seat and steps back to admire it.*)

MOLLY. Modern art!

KATE. Why not? Pity I can't boil water in it, though, so I could make you something. I really am sorry.

MOLLY. Don't worry about it. We understand. Besides, we should be bringing you something, to welcome you into the neighborhood. But I don't have kitchen privileges.

KATE. I beg your pardon?

MOLLY. I'm not supposed to cook in my daughter's house. It shouldn't look like they took me in to be a servant.

KATE. Oh, I see.

MOLLY (*serious, and suddenly rather intense*). Do you? I don't.

KATE (*a bit embarrassed and taken aback*). What I meant was—

MOLLY (*she stands up; KATE and JEFF do likewise*). Well, we don't want to overstay our welcome. Do we, Jeff? I just wanted to make a contribution. (*Hands KATE a dollar.*) My contribution.

KATE. Thank you. That's very nice of you. (*She puts money into collection packet.*)

MOLLY. That's it, Jeff. Let's be on our way.

KATE. No need to rush off.

MOLLY. Oh, yes, we really must go. We have important things to do.

JEFF. What important things, Grandma? We were just taking a walk.

KATE. A walk? The coldest day of the year and you're out taking a walk. I'm impressed.

MOLLY. Oh, we don't mind the cold, Jeff and me.

JEFF. Yes, we do. But we mind the fighting worse.

MOLLY. Jeff!

JEFF. She might as well know. Come spring, she'll open her windows and find out anyway.

MOLLY. You raise a child to be honest, and this is what you get for your trouble — an honest child. So it's not a walk, exactly. So call it — an escape.

KATE. From "they gave at the office"? (*MOLLY nods.*)
So stay a while. I'd really like to get acquainted.

MOLLY. But you're busy.

KATE. I'll unpack around you.

MOLLY. We won't be in your way?

KATE. Consider yourself a part of the clutter.

JEFF. Maybe we can help.

KATE. Maybe so. Maybe you can carry some stuff upstairs for me. Like that carton. Can you manage?

JEFF. Sure. (*He exits through archway with carton.*)

KATE. Atta boy! Thanks.

MOLLY. You want, I'll organize your kitchen for you.

KATE (*resisting*). Oh... well, maybe I better do that. The one who puts it away knows where it is, right?

MOLLY. I've got to do *something*.

KATE. No, you don't.

MOLLY. Kitchens are what I've always done best.

KATE. Just sit and we'll talk.

MOLLY. Just sit and we'll talk. (*She sits primly on sofa, obviously unhappy about it.*)

KATE. Did I say something wrong?

MOLLY. How wrong could it be? Everybody says the exact same thing to me lately. Just sit and we'll talk. Which usually means just sit and I'll forget you're there.

KATE. I see. Well, what the heck? Go on, play with my kitchen.

MOLLY (*bounces up, beaming*). All right. Don't mind if I do. (*She goes into the kitchen and gets to work. She and KATE move between rooms, unpacking as they chat.*)

KATE. But you've got to promise to talk.

MOLLY. Okay. What about?

KATE. How about yourself?

MOLLY. What's to say? I'm ten months a widow. I live with my daughter and her husband. I adore my grandson. (*She opens her hands, gesturing, "What else?"*)

KATE. That's it?

MOLLY. That's it.

KATE. That can't be a whole life.

MOLLY. It can't? Funny, I thought it was.

(*JEFF re-enters from archway.*)

JEFF. I put it in the big bedroom, Kate. Okay?

KATE. Oh, thanks, Jeff.

JEFF. What's next?

KATE. Oh, let's see — those two lamps, I guess. They go in the big bedroom, too. Better take them one at a time, all right? They cost me a week's salary each.

JEFF. I'll be careful. *(Takes one lamp and exits through archway.)*

MOLLY. Only one week's salary?

KATE. You know antiques?

MOLLY. My husband was in the business. You must be doing okay.

KATE. Yeah, I guess. I'm in advertising. I write those little jingles you hear on TV. You know: One-and-a, two-and-a, teeth all white? Yeah! Well, all right! Yeah!

MOLLY. I've seen that one.

KATE. Everyone has.

MOLLY. I don't like it.

KATE. Neither do I.

MOLLY. I like you, though.

KATE. Good. I like you, too, Mrs. Blumenthal.

MOLLY. Molly.

KATE. Molly, it is. *(They exchange a smile, then become shy and uncomfortable and get back to work.)* So, tell me about the neighborhood.

MOLLY. It's quiet. Very quiet. Whoever isn't already dead is in training.

KATE. I noticed that.

MOLLY. Old women without their men. It's very sad. Maybe those people who throw the widow on the funeral pyre have something.

KATE. Oh, terrific. Fried widow. Come on, there's more to life than taking care of your man.

MOLLY. Sure, there's children. But they grow up.

KATE. I don't have a man, at least not a permanent one. And I don't have children. I don't even have plants.

MOLLY. So I've noticed. What do you have?

KATE. Everything. Anything. (*Throws up her hands enthusiastically.*) Life!

MOLLY (*tries the same gesture on for size, but with doubts*). Life! Life! Well, you're young. You may still find a use for it. But you take Mrs. Davis—

KATE. Who?

MOLLY. Mrs. Davis. Next door. You were asking about the neighborhood.

KATE. Oh, of course. Mrs. Davis.

MOLLY. Mrs. Davis, according to my son-in-law David Bernstein, the Certified Public Accountant, has a very nice portfolio of blue chip stock. But what does she do with it? Nothing. She sits by the window. Just sits. Well, maybe she buys a little window cleaner now and then.

(*JEFF enters through archway.*)

JEFF. Mrs. Davis?

MOLLY. Who else?

JEFF. She doesn't even look out the window, Kate. That's the weird part. I wave sometimes, when I go by, but she acts like she doesn't even see me.

KATE. Maybe she's reading.

JEFF. Reading!

MOLLY. I never thought of that. She could be reading.

KATE. Haven't you ever spoken to her?

MOLLY. I tried. Jeff and I, we went over. It was like trying to make friends with a bunny rabbit. She was terrified. She slopped tea into the saucers, she was shaking so bad. It seemed more of a kindness to leave her alone.

KATE. Poor thing.

MOLLY. Poor, she's not. Unfortunate, maybe.

KATE. Well, who's next? Who's the one across the street with all the eye make-up? And the orange hair?

MOLLY. Oh, you must mean—

JEFF. The one — the only — Miss Fanny Feathers!

KATE. What?

MOLLY. That's our name for her.

JEFF. Grandma thinks she was a showgirl.

MOLLY. For want of a better word. In the spring, she bursts into bloom. You'll see. Frilly purple blouse. Tight green slacks. Golden slippers.

JEFF (*singing and strutting*). Oh, them golden slippers; oh, them golden slippers; yah-ta-ta-dah, yah-ta-ta—

MOLLY. Jeff, go take the other lamp upstairs.

JEFF. Grandma—

MOLLY. Upstairs.

JEFF. Oh, okay. (*Picks up lamp and struts out archway.*) Oh, them golden slippers; oh, them golden slippers—

KATE. Hey, that's a week's salary there!

JEFF (*his voice fading offstage*). Yah-ta-ta-dah, yah-ta-ta—

KATE (*to MOLLY*). Miss Fanny Feathers?

MOLLY (*confidentially*). She keeps a candle burning in her window every night. Jeff and I think it's for her lover who's lost at sea.

KATE. What sea? We're nowhere near a sea.

MOLLY. So no wonder he's lost.

KATE (*laughing*). You're very funny, Molly. (*MOLLY shrugs, but she's pleased.*) Okay, brown frame house on the corner.

MOLLY. That's Mrs. Feldman. She's—

(Doorbell rings. JEFF re-enters from arch.)

KATE. Excuse me.

(KATE answers door. MARSHA steps in.)

KATE. Yes?

MARSHA. I'm looking for my son and my mother.

MOLLY *(to JEFF)*. What do you say, J.B.? Are we gonna let her take us alive?

KATE *(to MARSHA)*. Oh, you're Mrs. Blumenthal. I mean, Mrs. Bernstein. Mrs. Blumenthal Bernstein.

MARSHA *(not amused)*. Marsha.

KATE. Kate. *(Offers MARSHA her hand, but MARSHA ignores it and turns to JEFF and MOLLY.)*

MARSHA. Very nice to meet you. What are you two doing here?

MOLLY. Visiting our new neighbor.

JEFF. I'm helping Kate unpack.

MARSHA. Do you have any idea how worried I've been? One minute you're there, the next minute you're gone. I look out the door. Nothing.

MOLLY. So you got out the bloodhounds.

MARSHA. It's not funny, Mama. Jeff has homework to do. And if he's so interested in housework, he can clean his room.

JEFF. I cleaned it this morning.

MARSHA. That's not what I call clean.

MOLLY *(aside)*. Three germs caught sunbathing on a speck of dust.

MARSHA. Mama!

MOLLY. Sorry.

JEFF. I'll clean it again later.

MARSHA. And you still have your homework.

JEFF. Mom, it's Saturday. I'll do it tomorrow.

MARSHA. Jeffrey, I want you home. Now.

JEFF. Okay. but can I carry up one more carton? I kind of promised.

KATE. Oh, Jeff, you don't have to— *(At a signal from MOLLY, she stops short.)*

JEFF. And then I'll come right home. Please, Mom?

MARSHA. All right. But don't dawdle.

JEFF. I won't. *(KATE indicates a carton; JEFF exits with it.)*

MARSHA *(to MOLLY)*. You're coming?

MOLLY *(thinks it over)*. No.

MARSHA. It's almost dinner time.

MOLLY. It's half-past three.

MARSHA. I know what time it is, Mama. I thought you might want to take a nap before dinner.

MOLLY. Why? Are you making something exhausting to eat?

MARSHA *(not amused)*. I just thought you looked tired, that's all. You have bags under your eyes.

MOLLY. I'm seventy-one years old, Marsha. I have bags under a lot of things. Please don't let it worry you. I'll be home in plenty of time for dinner. Have you ever known me to be late for a meal?

MARSHA. No.

MOLLY. Of course not. It's against my religion.

MARSHA. The streets are very slick. Just the other day a woman your age fell and broke her hip—

MOLLY. Spare me the details! I can make it across the street on my own. I got here, didn't I? I'll get back.

MARSHA. All right, have it your way. *(To KATE, without feeling.)* Nice meeting you.