

# SUN DRIED

by EDNA FERBER

adapted for the stage by WALTER WYKES

## CHARACTERS

MARY LOUISE

CHARLIE

MAN

## SETTING

A New York rooftop

## TIME

1912

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## SUN DRIED

*[A rooftop in New York. MARY LOUISE, an attractive young woman, appears on the stairway, her head wrapped turban-style in a towel. CHARLIE, a janitor, enters behind her. The sounds of the city can be heard far below.]*

CHARLIE

How's this?

MARY LOUISE

Perfect! It's perfect! Thank you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

It ain't long on grassy spots up here, but say, breeze! Like a summer resort. On a clear day you can see way over 's far 's Eight' Avenoo. Only for the love of Mike don't blab it to the other women folks in the buildin', or I'll have the whole works of 'em usin' the roof for a general sun, massage, an' beauty parlor.

MARY LOUISE

I'll never breathe it to a soul. I promise.

CHARLIE

*[Noticing something in her hand.]*

What's that?

MARY LOUISE

It—it's parsley.

CHARLIE

Parsley! Well, what the—

MARY LOUISE

Well, you see. I'm from the country, and in the country, at this time of year, when you dry your hair in the back yard, you get the most wonderful scent of green and growing things—not just flowers, you know, but new things coming up in the vegetable garden, and—and—well, this parsley happens to be the only really gardeny thing I have, so I thought I'd bring it along and sniff it once in a while, and make believe it's the country, up here on the roof.

CHARLIE

*[Chuckles.]*

Women ain't nothin' but little girls in long skirts, and their hair done up.

MARY LOUISE

I know it.

*[The two of them stand there for a moment, looking up at the blue sky and the sunshine.]*

If you go up high enough, the sunshine is almost the same as it is in the country, isn't it?

CHARLIE

I shouldn't wonder, though Calvary cemetery is about as near's I'll ever get to the country. Say, you can set here on this soap box and let your feet hang down. The last janitor's wife used to hang her washin' up here, I guess. I'll leave this door open, see?

MARY LOUISE

You're so kind.

CHARLIE

Kin you blame me?

*[Exit CHARLIE. MARY LOUISE perches on the soap box and unwinds her turban. Draping the damp towel over her shoulders, she shakes out her hair idly, with one hand, sniffs her parsley, shuts her eyes, throws back her head, and begins to sing, beating time with her heel against the soap box.]*

MARY LOUISE

BY THE LIGHT (BY THE LIGHT, BY THE LIGHT),  
 OF THE SILVERY MOON (THE SILVERY MOON)  
 I WANT TO SPOON (WANT TO SPOON, WANT TO SPOON)  
 TO MY HONEY I'LL CROON LOVE'S TUNE.  
 HONEYMOON (HONEYMOON, HONEYMOON),  
 KEEP A SHINING IN JUNE (KEEP A SHINING IN JUNE)  
 YOUR SILVERY BEAMS WILL BRING LOVE'S DREAM,  
 WE'LL BE CUDDLING SOON,  
 BY THE SILVERY MOON.

*[A MAN appears on the stairway, wearing shabby slippers and no collar. He watches MARY LOUISE for a moment as she sings. The last note is a bit off-key and he laughs as she searches for the right note.]*

MAN

What's this? Some Coney Island concession gone wrong?

*[MARY LOUISE's eyes flash open.]*

MARY LOUISE

*[Embarrassed.]*

It ... it isn't very nice to sneak up on a woman like that.

MAN

Who's sneaking? I presume you're the janitor's beautiful daughter.

MARY LOUISE

Well, not exactly. Are you the scrub-lady's stalwart son?

MAN

Ha! No. But then, all women look alike with their hair down.

MARY LOUISE

For that matter, all men look like picked chickens with their collars off.

*[At this, the collarless MAN, who until now has remained on the stairway, comes slowly forward, steps languidly over a skylight or two, and sits down, hugging his long legs to him.]*

MAN

Nice up here, isn't it?

MARY LOUISE

It was.

MAN

Ha! Where's your mirror?

MARY LOUISE

Mirror?

MAN

Sure. You have the hair, the comb, the attitude, and the general Lorelei effect. Also your singing lured me to your shores.

MARY LOUISE

You didn't look lured—you looked lurid.

MAN

What's that stuff in your hand?

MARY LOUISE

Parsley.

MAN

Parsley! Well, what the—

MARY LOUISE

Back home, after you've washed your hair you dry it in the back yard, sitting on the grass, in the sunshine and the breeze. And the garden smells come to you—the nasturtiums, and the pansies, and the geraniums, you know, and even that clean grass smell, and the pungent vegetable odor, and there are ants, and bees, and butterflies—

MAN

Go on.

MARY LOUISE

And Mrs. Next Door comes out to hang a few stockings and a couple of baby dresses she's just scrubbed clean, and she calls out to you: "Washed your hair?" "Yes," you say. "It was something awful, and I wanted it nice for Tuesday night. But I suppose I won't be able to do a thing with it." And then Mrs. Next Door stands there a minute with the wind whipping her skirts about her, and the fresh smell of growing things coming to her. And suddenly she says: "I guess I'll wash mine too, while the baby's asleep."

*[The MAN moves closer to MARY LOUISE's soap box.]*

MAN

You live here?

MARY LOUISE

If I didn't, do you think I'd choose this as the one spot in all New York to dry my hair?

MAN

When I said, "live here," I didn't mean just that. I meant who are you, and why are you here, and where do you come from, and do you sign your real name to your stuff, or use a nom de plume?

MARY LOUISE

What—how did you know I was a writer?

MAN

*[Grins.]*

Give me five minutes more, and I'll tell you what make your typewriter is, and where the last rejection slip came from.

MARY LOUISE

Oh! Then you *are* the scrub-lady's stalwart son, and you've been ransacking my waste-basket!

MAN

Let's see ... you thought you could write, so you came to New York—one doesn't just travel to New York, you know, or move to it, one *comes* to New York—and now you're here and things aren't going quite as planned. You haven't sold a single story, your cupboard's getting bare, and you're not so sure about the writing anymore? Am I warm?

MARY LOUISE

*[Evasively.]*

Maybe.

MAN

Maybe? Or yes that's exactly right you must be psychic?

MARY LOUISE

All right—yes. I don't know how you can see all that. But yes, it's true.

MAN

And what's the problem—with your writing, I mean? Why hasn't it sold?

MARY LOUISE

You can't see that in your little crystal ball?

MAN

My powers are limited.

MARY LOUISE

I don't know. I don't know what the problem is. I've been trying to write about the city, you know, my experiences here. Then I decided to write a love story, but that's not working out either. My hero sounds more like a clothing store dummy than a real live human being, and, from what I hear, editors aren't fond of black-mustachioed figures nowadays. I've been fighting with him for a week now, the stubborn mule. He won't make love to my heroine. He refuses. I've tried to put red blood in his veins, but the two of them just won't get together—they're as far

apart as they were the day I sat down to write. I'm at my wit's end. I've bitten off nearly half of my fingernails—look—see?

MAN

Maybe it's your heroine. Maybe she just doesn't inspire him.

MARY LOUISE

No, there's nothing wrong with my heroine—I'm sure of that. She's a fascinating, mysterious, graceful creature, full of wit and passion and adventure, but not once has he clasped her to him fiercely or pressed his lips to her hair, her eyes, her cheeks. He hasn't even had the guts to "devour her with his gaze" as we writers like to say. This morning I thought he might be showing some signs of life. He was developing possibilities. But nothing came of it. He wimped out. That's why I decided to wash my hair and come out here—to get away from him for a little while.

MAN

What did you do back home?

MARY LOUISE

Back home? I taught school—and hated it. But I kept on teaching until I'd saved five hundred dollars. All the other girls teach until they've saved five hundred dollars—then they pack two suit-cases and go to Europe for the summer. But I saved my five hundred for New York. I've been here six months now, and the five hundred has shrunk to almost nothing, and if I don't break into the magazines pretty soon—

MAN

Then?

MARY LOUISE

Then, I'll have to go back and teach thirty-seven young devils that six times five is thirty, put down the naught and carry six, that a rhetorical question requires no answer, and that the French are a gay people, fond of dancing and light wines. But I'll scrimp on everything from hairpins to shoes, and back again until I've saved up another five hundred, and then I'll try it all over again, because I—can—write.

*[From the depths of one pocket the inquiring MAN takes a small black pipe, from another a bag of tobacco, from another a match. His long, deft fingers make a brief task of it.]*

MAN

I didn't ask your permission because I could see you weren't the fool kind that objects.

MARY LOUISE

*[With a wave of her hand.]*

No, go ahead.

MAN

Know any of the editors?

MARY LOUISE

Know them! Know them! If camping on their doorsteps, and haunting the office buildings, and cajoling, and fighting with secretaries and office boys, and assistants and things constitutes knowing them, then sure—we're chums.

MAN

What kind of feedback have you gotten?

MARY LOUISE

*Feedback?**[She laughs.]*

Nothing. None. "It's not what we're looking for." "After careful consideration, we've decided not to accept your submission at this time." "Buzz off."

MAN

*[Almost sneering.]*

And if these literary experts think so little of your writing, what makes you think you can write?

*[Mary Louise gathers up her brush, and comb, and towel, and parsley, and jumps off the soap box. She points belligerently at her tormentor with the hand that holds the brush.]*

MARY LOUISE

Being the scrub-lady's stalwart son, you wouldn't understand. But I can write. How dare you come up here and ... and ... act all high and mighty like you've got me all figured out in two minutes! I don't care what you think! I won't go under! I'm going to make it! I'm going to make this town count me in as the four million and oneth! Sometimes I get so tired of being nobody at all, with not even enough cleverness to wrest a living from this big city, that I want to stand out at the edge of the curb and just scream! Take off my hat, and wave, and shout, "Hey, you four million self-absorbed, uncaring people, I'm Mary Louise Moss, from Escanaba, Michigan, and I like your town, and I want to stay here! Won't you please pay some attention to me! Just a little bit!" No one even knows I'm here except ... well ... myself and the rent collector.

MAN

And me.

MARY LOUISE

*[Sneering back at him.]*

Oh, you. You don't count.

MAN

*[With a curious little twisted smile.]*

You never can tell. I might.

*[Then, quite suddenly, he stands up, knocks the ash out of his pipe, and comes over to Mary Louise, who is preparing to descend the steep little flight of stairs.]*

Look here, Mary Louise Moss, from Escanaba, Michigan, you stop trying to write the slop you're writing now. Stop it. Drop the love stories that are just like the stuff everybody else in this town writes. Stop trying to write about New York. You don't know anything about it. Listen. You get back to work, and write about Mrs. Next Door, and the hair-washing, and the vegetable garden, and bees, and the back yard, understand? You write the way you talked to me, and then you send your stuff in to Cecil Reeves.

MARY LOUISE

Reeves! Cecil Reeves, of *The Earth*? Are you kidding? He wouldn't dream of looking at my stuff. And anyway, it isn't really any of your business—is it?

MAN

Well, you know, you brought me up here, kicking with your heels, and singing at the top of your lungs. I couldn't work. So it's really your fault if I've stuck my nose where it doesn't belong.

*[He turns and begins to descend the stairs—then, just as he is about to disappear.]*

How often do you wash your hair?

MARY LOUISE

*What?*

MAN

Your hair—how often do you—

MARY LOUISE

Well ... back home, every six weeks or so was enough, but—

MAN

Not here. That's all very well for the country, but it won't do in the city. Once a week, at least, and on the roof. Cleanliness demands it.

MARY LOUISE

But if I'm going back to the country, it won't really matter.

MAN

But you're not. You're not going back to the country—I can see it in my crystal ball.

*[The MAN exits. MARY LOUISE stares after him uncertainly. After a moment, CHARLIE reappears with a rag and a pail of water.]*

CHARLIE

Get it dry?

MARY LOUISE

Yes, thank you.

*[Pause.]*

There ... there was a man up here ... a very tall, very thin, very rude, very ... that is, rather nice youngish oldish man, in slippers, and no collar. I wonder—

CHARLIE

Oh, him! He don't show himself 'cept onct in a blue moon. None of the other tenants even knows he's up here. Has the whole top floor to himself, and shuts himself up there for weeks at a time, writin' books, or some such truck. That guy, he owns the building.

MARY LOUISE

Owens the building! But he looked—he looked—

CHARLIE

Sure, that's him. Name's Reeves—Cecil Reeves. Say, ain't that a divil of a name?  
*[Blackout.]*

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