

Tea Girl

A Comedy in One Act

by C. Rusch

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CHARACTERS

VIOLET	A tea packer. Mid to late teens. Plain hair, no makeup.
MILLIE	A tea packer. Mid- to late-forties. Wears her hair in a pretty French roll and puffy bangs.
ROSIE	A tea packer. Thirties. Wears longish, ruthlessly curled, bright red hair and heavy makeup.
HUNTER	A coffee vendor. A man in his twenties.

SETTING

The story takes place in a tea packing factory in the early 1960s.

Note:

The factory is a large, bleak room where the women work at noisy, ugly machines. The story can be well served when these machines -- and other elements of the set -- are merely suggested or implied.

Scene One

(The sound of machinery. Lights come up on the Carlton Tea Factory, a bleak warehouse stacked with large, unfolded cardboard cartons, and big wooden crates marked "Ceylon". It is mid-morning.

Stage Left is dominated by a representation of three tea packing machines: tall, ungainly structures which dominate the WOMEN'S attention. PLEASE SEE NOTE under "Setting".

In reality each machine would hold a roll of paper for the bags, a roll of wire for the staples, a roll labels, a roll of string, and would be equipped with a chute at the ceiling, where loose tea sifts from bins in the attic down the machine. They would make a clicking noise as they carry the tea bags for the WOMEN to examine, count, and pack.

Against the wall Upstage Left there is a door marked "office", and next to it a punch clock. There is a regular door to the outside.

Upstage Right is a worktable where loose tea is packed in bulk. Downstage Right, at the delivery dock, is a small circle of crates where the WOMEN gather for THEIR breaks. The large, garage-type door for deliveries is open.

AT RISE

VIOLET, a YOUNG WOMAN in HER mid teens, works at HER machine. Like the OTHER WOMEN, SHE wears the faded blue wrap-around uniform sealed with a length of packing tape.

MILLIE, a WOMAN in HER mid- to late- forties, is talking over the noise of the machines to ROSIE, a WOMAN in HER late thirties, with garishly dyed hair wrapped in curlers.

VIOLET moves quickly but SHE is clumsy, struggling to keep up with the pace of the machine. MILLIE works so quickly and smoothly that SHE has to wait for HER machine to catch up. ROSIE works sporadically, using the moments when SHE catches up to take curlers out of HER hair. SHE stuffs the curlers into HER pockets.

MILLIE notices that SHE is out of paper. She calls out loudly.)

Outa roll!

MILLIE

(SHE continues to work, looking off, expecting to see SOMEONE.)

Outa roll, I said...Freddy? Freddy, where're you at?

MILLIE (Yelling.)

(SHE turns off HER machine and goes off.)

That voice of yours sounds real good today.

ROSIE (To MILLIE, off.)

Same voice I always had.

MILLIE'S VOICE

Uh uh. (No.)

ROSIE

Is, too.

MILLIE'S VOICE

No, it ain't.

ROSIE

(MILLIE returns with a large cylinder of paper that SHE rolls on the floor over to HER machine.)

I seen you necking.

ROSIE

MILLIE (Fastening cylinder.)

You did not.

ROSIE

Uh huh. Out in the front seat of a pretty blue Chevy. (SHE slaps MILLIE on the fanny.) I seen you!

MILLIE

So? It ain't nothing.

ROSIE

Then why ain't you wearing a girdle today?

MILLIE

Shut your mouth, Rosie Malloy.

ROSIE

He likes it soft, don't he?

MILLIE

You better go to the johnny and wash out your mouth with soap, is what you better do.

ROSIE

How are you gonna get him to propose?

MILLIE

I said shut your mouth.

ROSIE

You could just ask him yourself.

MILLIE

I will not.

ROSIE

You should. I seen him, there with you. He's got a full head of hair.

MILLIE

So what if he does?

ROSIE

It proves I seen him. I seen the Chevy, too. Couldn't've been more than a year old. You're gonna look real good driving around in it.

MILLIE

I don't want no Chevy.

ROSIE

Sure you don't.

MILLIE

I ain't you, Rosie. My hair ain't red, and it never was.

ROSIE

That's exactly what I'm talking about. Look at you. You don't got no husband, you don't got no car, and even from clear over here, I can see so much gray on your hair, it makes me sick. I'm telling you, if you want another man, you're gonna have to get off your butt and smell the coffee, because if you think a steady working guy with a new Chevy is going to come knocking on your front door every day, then you have lost your mind.

MILLIE

Yeah, well maybe I don't want to get married again.

ROSIE

This is no time for joking, Mill.

MILLIE

I ain't joking.

ROSIE

Do you know what I'm talking about?

MILLIE

I know what you're talking about, and I still ain't joking.

ROSIE

Red hair don't mean nothing, that's what it means.

MILLIE

Where's Freddy at?

ROSIE

I don't know, but when he comes in, he's gonna have a fit.

MILLIE

Ain't my fault I run outa roll.

ROSIE (Glance at clock.)

No sense turning it on now; it's about time for break.

MILLIE

Can you see Hector yet?

ROSIE (Peering out delivery door.)

No, but I don't care where he's at, I ain't packing no more until I have my coffee.

(SHE keeps packing, however, as SHE and MILLIE watch VIOLET with amusement while the YOUNG WOMAN struggles, trying to keep up with HER machine.)

VIOLET is too absorbed in HER work to notice the WOMEN.)

Hey Violet!

ROSIE (In very loud voice.)

(VIOLET looks up.)

Huh?

VIOLET

(HER machine keeps going, and soon overflows with tea bags.)

Do you know what time it is?

ROSIE

(VIOLET looks at HER watch. SHE holds it up to HER ear.)

Uh oh. I forgot to wind it.

VIOLET

Watch what you're doing!

MILLIE

(VIOLET notices HER overflowing machine and tries to catch up, but SHE cannot. MILLIE switches off VIOLET'S machine.)

It's time for my coffee!

ROSIE

(ROSIE switches off HER machine, and the three WOMEN walk over to the clock and punch out. Then THEY go over to the loading dock and sit down on the crates. VIOLET carries a small brown bag.