

# ***Echo Chamber***

*by*

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Cast of Characters

MRS. HENLEY:

40

JUSTINE:

20's

Place

Estate Gardens

Time

Evening

2.

Setting: The play takes place in the gardens of Mrs. Henley's family estate, outside the servant's quarters.

At Rise: Mrs. Henley is at the front door when Justine opens it and the play begins.

MRS. HENLEY: Good evening, Justine.

JUSTINE: ...Good evening. Won't you come in--

MRS. HENLEY: Oh, no, I, I'd much rather wait outside. Will you join me?

JUSTINE: Sure. I'm just going to grab my scarf.

MRS. HENLEY walks out towards the front garden.

JUSTINE comes out to join her.

JUSTINE: Quite a surprise.

Awkward pause.

MRS. HENLEY: So it is true?

JUSTINE: Yes, Mrs. Henley.

MRS. HENLEY: Is all of it true?

JUSTINE nods yes.

Dear, God. You know my father is not a well man.

JUSTINE: Yes...I'm aware--

MRS. HENLEY: Who else knows about this?

JUSTINE: Only Robertson.

MRS. HENLEY: Right...do you plan to keep the child?

JUSTINE: Of course.

MRS. HENLEY: Would you consider placing the baby in my care?

JUSTINE: Well I haven't even--

MRS. HENLEY: He or she will be raised as my own. Surely you can't imagine you could ever give the baby a good life.

JUSTINE: I don't know.

MRS. HENLEY: What don't you know?

JUSTINE: I am the mother.

MRS. HENLEY: You will allow my father's illness to determine your future happiness?

JUSTINE: Not at all.

MRS. HENLEY: Then I can take the baby from you.

JUSTINE: It isn't your decision.

MRS. HENLEY: I am offering you an opportunity to release yourself from this burden.

JUSTINE: I am not sure I would call it that.

MRS. HENLEY: What is it? What are you after?

JUSTINE: I've discussed these matters with Robertson and he and I are willing to raise this baby up as our own.

MRS. HENLEY: But you are both servants. Where do you imagine you will ever find the means?

JUSTINE: We consider this a blessing, for we have always fantasized about having a child of our own.

MRS. HENLEY: Do you expect my family to reimburse your valiant effort?

JUSTINE: Not at all. We will go on as we've always gone on.

MRS. HENLEY: What a disaster...do you know I have tried to conceive for nearly seventeen years before giving up. It wasn't in my nature. That's what the physician told me, "Mrs. Henley, having a baby is not in your nature." Well, how is that? A lonely, empty home with nothing but an echo of my mind playing tricks on me...at times, early in the morning, I sometimes imagine children's voices playing in the living room. I hear them! Giggling, laughing, so much so that I venture into the corridors only to see nothing but stillness...quiet. All the while my heart pounding for the right to give life and instead I'm reduced to dust and dirt, for I feel like a ghost haunted by my own weakness...an echo chamber made up of my own cursed mind. There's no escaping it, Justine...but now, now there is a chance, with you as my beacon, to set me free by allowing me to take your baby as my own. I could become the baby's mother...without a word of this to anyone. We will keep this secret amongst ourselves.

JUSTINE: This child will be your brother.

MRS. HENLEY: No! No! I will not have you say that. I will be the mother. Pure, simple and honest. How the baby was brought here would be of no concern to me. You will be nothing more than it's carrier. You see? I will be it's guardian. Once you have delivered, it would have a place in this world, with comfort.

JUSTINE: This is more than just a delivery! I will go through the agony and cries. My blood will be the child's blood.

MRS. HENLEY: This child was created in vain!

JUSTINE: Not by my choice but by your sick father's!!

(pause.)

MRS. HENLEY: Yes...yes, you are correct. There can never be an excuse given to bring light to his wrongful action against you. For that, I am deeply sorry Justine...but please, let me at least take the baby as a way to heal your womb.

JUSTINE: No.

MRS. HENLEY: This can be our chance. Together. I will raise your station. You and Robertson are to be married on my estate and you will be given---

JUSTINE: We do not believe such charity will matter.

MRS. HENLEY: Justine, you must think clearly about what I'm saying to you. You are a young, beautiful woman who is in love with Robertson, who has no further ambition than to work for my family and exist. Don't you see your future?

JUSTINE: That isn't true. Robertson has many wonderful attributes. He is getting an education by...

MRS. HENLEY: What? Education did you say? How? Whom?

JUSTINE: He has ambition.

MRS. HENLEY: I see. Well, I don't want things to go this way but I can bring great harm upon you both.

JUSTINE: What harm?

MRS. HENLEY: I don't wish to threaten you Justine, but if I don't get my way in this matter, I will be forced to have Robertson thrown in jail.

JUSTINE: What?! On what grounds?!

MRS. HENLEY: He is a thief.

JUSTINE: He is no thief!

MRS. HENLEY: Evidence suggests that books have gone missing in the library, there can be a whole case brought against him.

JUSTINE: And your father will reign innocent?

MRS. HENLEY: No one will ever believe my father would have gone near you.

JUSTINE: He forced himself on me and you stand there to defend him. Have you no humanity?

MRS. HENLEY: My father is mentally disturbed. He had no right to do what he did...

JUSTINE: I know how these courts work, Mrs. Henley. Your father's reputation, wealth...there isn't much for a servant such as myself can do to take my own stand...that I am all too aware, but to try and take my baby, that is something entirely different and something I will fight to the death for. You may have your reasons and I empathize with you, but this baby will be formed inside of me and formed into this world based on all the love I can give it. You can raise all the accusations you desire against Robertson, I'm sure it wouldn't take you long to see him imprisoned or murdered, but that won't make you this baby's mother.

MRS. HENLEY: I almost admire you.

JUSTINE: Are we finished here?

MRS. HENLEY: We are finished when I say that we are. I will never have a baby.

JUSTINE: That isn't my issue.

MRS. HENLEY: Of course it isn't. Nothing I wanted more throughout my entire life. Perhaps we started off on the wrong foot, Justine. Perhaps if you can consider this...I would go to the ends of the earth for you and Robertson to disappear. After your baby is born, if handed over to me, I will give you the world. Discuss this with Robertson, tell him that if he has any ambition at all, I will see to it that he fulfills his promise. I will be his sponsor. I will make certain that you and him are forever looked after and will never want for anything, so long as you please, please allow me to take this baby as my own and raise it as mother. This all may sound completely far-fetched, but we've known one another for an alarming amount of time...this can bring us both immense joy. Will you talk to him?

JUSTINE: Perhaps I could talk to him.

MRS. HENLEY: That is all I wish.

JUSTINE appears dizzy and leans against  
a tree.

Oh dear, are you alright? Shall I get you some water.

JUSTINE: Yes, please, water.

JUSTINE sits on the ground, still leaning against the tree.

MRS. HENLEY uses the nearby water well and brings up a bucket of water. She dips a jug into the bucket and brings it over to JUSTINE.

JUSTINE slowly drinks. She puts jug on the ground and tries to get up but is too weak.

MRS. HENLEY: No, no. Sit. Stay. Stay. Everything will be okay, Justine. We need patience. That's all we need. Patience and everything will be ours...everything.

END OF PLAY