

The Typed Manuscript

by

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Cast of Characters

EDWINA:

Late 50's

JESSICA:

Early 20's

Place
Garden

Time
Morning

Setting: The play takes place in Edwina's garden. A narrow garden but large enough to be filled with an assortment of flowers and plants that give off the feeling of awe and wonder. There is a small porch attached to the house and on this porch rests a round table with comfortable seating. On the table is an elaborate display of tea accompanied with two flat dishes, biscuits, sugar, milk, spoons and napkins.

At Rise: The play opens to a bright sunny day. Edwina is seated at the table overlooking her garden when Jessica arrives standing frozen at the doorway. Edwina and Jessica stare at one another before -

EDWINA: You are here...you've drove me crazy for the better part of a year and all you can do is stare blankly at me.

JESSICA: Oh, sorry, was I staring? I didn't mean to -

EDWINA: Yes, staring. Hate it when people do that.

JESSICA: I didn't mean to -

EDWINA: Of course you did. Why deny it? If I were a beauty queen that's one thing -

JESSICA: I wasn't trying to make you uncomfortable -

EDWINA: Uncomfortable? Why would I allow a twenty-something year old to make me feel uncomfortable. Let's move forward, the answer is no.

JESSICA: No?

EDWINA: No.

JESSICA: But I haven't asked you anything.

EDWINA: But you have. I can read between the lines of your intent, your emails, letters, voice messages..behavior. The answer is a resounding NO. If you'll excuse me and then yourself. You may exit same way you entered.

Edwina walks away from the table and enters her garden. She picks up a water canteen and sprays her flowers.

Jessica looks on. Jessica enters the garden.

JESSICA: Edwina?

EDWINA: Thought I told you to leave.

JESSICA: I will leave but I'm not very good at - why did you have me visit you if you were to only turn me away?

EDWINA: You've turned yourself away.

JESSICA: But, how?

EDWINA: Please, go.

JESSICA: Couldn't you offer me a cup of tea, before I'm off?

EDWINA: Would that be fair in your eyes?

JESSICA: I believe it would..be...fair.

EDWINA: Guess what? Not a two minute walk from here on Main Street is a corner cafe that has exceptional tea. The biscuits are sub-par but the tea is superb. Why don't you run yourself there and be off?

JESSICA: Has anyone told you to your face that you are rude?

EDWINA: (*Laughs.*)

JESSICA: You take pleasure in it?

EDWINA: How could I not?

Jessica walks over to the table and pours herself a cup of tea. She stuffs a few biscuits simultaneously in her mouth and chews, all the while staring at Edwina.

JESSICA (*Mouth full.*): How's that for rude?

EDWINA: Not bad.

Jessica coughs and chokes.

EDWINA: Christ!

Edwina walks behind Jessica and slaps her back a few times. Jessica coughs out the biscuits and breathes deeply.

Edwina sits down.

EDWINA: You won't get far in life if you continue going on in this way. How old are you? Twenty-one? Twenty-three, at most? At your age I was on my third novel. I didn't spend time visiting strangers, getting teary-eyed and choking on biscuits in their garden. I hadn't the time, nor did I have the courage to humiliate myself as such. Either you're too naïve or too ambitious. I'm leaning toward naïve, but you did keep on with me for almost a year. That shows some chutzpah, I would think.

Regardless, you've really got yourself fired up on the wrong foot. Which shows lack of sincerity and that isn't something I like. But it can be that you don't know how to play the game, the politics of people, their psychology...patience, to get what you want; that reveals your ignorance, a lack of schooling...your nauseating purity and that is..well, rare. Yet, ultimately forgotten.

EDWINA (cont'd): I had that once, but where I come from, in order to survive, I had to soak up life faster than most. Had no choice, really. You on the other hand, you're wholesome, pampered. You've probably never had anything much to cry over. I'll give you that now. Get out! Get out of my garden and don't ever come back!

JESSICA: Incredible.

EDWINA: What did you say to me?

JESSICA: A bit of made up fiction..about me..remarkable. Do you go through life thinking you have everyone figured out?

EDWINA: Usually. I was wrong about a dog once.

JESSICA: I'm adopted. Never knew my real parents. They were killed in a car crash when I was four years old. All I had was my Grandmother but two years later she too died. Next thing I know I was getting bullied until I was adopted and raised by a strict hand, the kind of hand that did the talking. I'm not naïve Miss Fletcher..I'm only trying to be polite.

Jessica goes to leave.

EDWINA: Drink more tea.

JESSICA: Excuse me?

EDWINA: Tea. You are welcome to drink more tea, before you make your grand exit.

(Beat.)

JESSICA: What would have been the better way?

EDWINA: I'm not a teacher.

JESSICA: To approach you, when I first walked in, how -

EDWINA: Reduce the staring for one. It's downright stupid.

JESSICA: I didn't plan on - something came over me.

EDWINA: So it seems.

JESSICA: Yes.

EDWINA: It's all too late anyway. I still can't see much finesse in you. Why don't you get on with it and ask me what you've come to ask.

JESSICA: I don't think it's a good idea.

EDWINA: You've almost died before my eyes, surely we've skipped right over the formalities.

JESSICA: Are you sure?

EDWINA: *(Raises her eyebrows.)*

JESSICA: Okay. *(About to speak.)*

EDWINA *(Cutting her off.)*: No.

JESSICA: What?

EDWINA: The answer is still, no.

JESSICA: I haven't asked my question!

EDWINA: I have not written a word for the public in over twenty years. There.

JESSICA: But you allude to the fact that you've been writing. Have you been writing?

EDWINA: Not for you. Not for them. For me.

JESSICA: But why?

EDWINA: Because I'm fed up.

JESSICA: But don't you want to share the next book in your series?

EDWINA: No.

JESSICA: How can you leave your audience hanging?

EDWINA: I live here, I pay my bills and I can do whatever the hell I like.

JESSICA: Your fans never did anything to you but love you, praise your work. Why abandon them for so many years?

EDWINA: Thought you said you weren't a journalist.

JESSICA: I'm not.

EDWINA: I have my reasons.

JESSICA: But isn't there a part of you that wants to -

EDWINA: Not anymore.

JESSICA: But isn't the act of writing intended for others to read?

EDWINA: Says who?

JESSICA: Well -

EDWINA: Why can't the act of writing be solely for me? What's wrong with that?

JESSICA: Because you've involved the world. You can't open your door, only to end up slamming it in everyone's face.

EDWINA: The door was slammed in MY face.

JESSICA: By who?

EDWINA: I no longer wish to be a product, a brand. Controlled!

JESSICA: What do you plan on doing with what you wrote?

EDWINA: When I die, all the original copies will be burned.

JESSICA: How many more books are there in the series?

EDWINA: (*Laughs.*)

JESSICA: Tell me.

EDWINA: How old are you?

JESSICA: Twenty-two.

EDWINA: There are twenty-two more novels, completed novels.

JESSICA: That's extraordinary.

EDWINA: It's only writing.

JESSICA: It's more than only writing.

EDWINA: I'm not saving the world from destruction. It's writing! Fiction, fake! It's imaginary, dear girl. Big deal. I write to stay sane. I couldn't care less who likes my work and who doesn't. I just got lucky early on. Had a hit, made a ton of pathetic money and so it sells each and every year like a steady check. Why shouldn't I be allowed to sit back, be alone and write what I enjoy writing without all the additional fuss?

JESSICA: Don't you care about the people who read your work?

EDWINA: I couldn't give a shit, to put it bluntly.

JESSICA: Oh.

EDWINA: Disappointed?

JESSICA: Yes.

EDWINA: That's life.

JESSICA: I have a hard time believing you.

EDWINA: Why's that?

JESSICA: Because for anyone to write about humanity the way in which you do, the compassion you reveal, the depth, the understanding..your contradiction cannot be true..it's put on. It has to be false.

EDWINA: Are you heartbroken?

JESSICA: I simply don't believe you.

EDWINA: Good. At least you have some perspective.

JESSICA: Why did you agree to see me?

EDWINA: It doesn't matter.

JESSICA: It does. To me, it does.

EDWINA: Honestly, I wanted to be rid of you and the only way was to have this meeting. So there.

JESSICA: But why me? Why not someone else?

EDWINA: How do you know whether or not I've met someone else?

JESSICA: You're a recluse.

EDWINA: I'm not. Read that in the papers, did you?

JESSICA: Well -

EDWINA: Do you really think you were singled out?

JESSICA: I don't know.

EDWINA: Right. Well, I do expect all communication between us to be closed now. I've met you and that's that.

JESSICA: I wrote a novel.

EDWINA: Congratulations.

JESSICA: I wrote your fourth novel.

EDWINA: You did what?

JESSICA: For fun..I wrote what I think would happen next in the series.

EDWINA: Why waste your time?

JESSICA: It was an exercise, really.

EDWINA: Hmm.

JESSICA: I'd like to drop it off.

Jessica takes out a typed manuscript and places it on the table.

EDWINA: Not interested.

JESSICA: Please. I've spent a year writing it.

EDWINA: I'd much rather have nothing to do with you.

JESSICA: That's okay. It's, well, it's the only copy and I wish to give it to you as a gift. I - I don't want your opinion or feedback or anything like that. I only wish to give it to you because I don't know, it matters I guess. Please - please take it.

EDWINA: *(Nods.)*

Jessica gets up.

JESSICA: Thank you. *(Tries to say something but no words.)*

Jessica turns and leaves.

Edwina places her hand on the typed manuscript.

Lights slowly fade to black.

END OF PLAY