

(DRAFT: 16 Sep 2019)

A FAIRLY WIDE STANCE

A play in one act
By Craig Houk



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Cast of Characters

EDWIN SPRATT: The Senator for Wisconsin (late 40s)
ELEONORE SPRATT: Edwin's Wife (mid-40s)
ADDISON SPRATT: Edwin's Adoptive Father (early 70s)
ABIGAIL SPRATT: Edwin's Adoptive Mother (mid to late 60s)
LUCAS SPRATT: Edwin's Transsexual Son (early 20s)
GREGORY SPRATT Edwin's Cisgender Son (mid-20s)
LEYLA FIGGIS: Lucas's Girlfriend (early 20s)
RILEY KIDD: A Witness & the Senator's Trick (early 30s)
NELSON BEAL: The Senator's Arresting Officer (late 20s)

Place

The State of Wisconsin

Time

Summer 2007

SCENE 1

(A dining room in the Senator's home. He and his wife sit eating together. He looks at her and smiles tenderly. She looks at him, smiles dimly and then returns to her meal. He continues smiling, with increasing intensity. Uncomfortable with his ogling, she addresses him quietly but sternly.)

ELEONORE

Why are you smiling?

EDWIN

I love you.

ELEONORE

The wine is tasty. Dry. Not at all sweet. Just the way I like it.

EDWIN

Did you hear what I said? I said, "I love you."

ELEONORE

Yes. I heard you. I love you, too.

(She smiles politely.)

EDWIN

I mean it... this time.

ELEONORE

This time?

EDWIN

Yes.

ELEONORE

What do you mean by "this time"? Are you telling me that all previous "I love yous" were meaningless?

EDWIN

I've come to a realization... recently. And... I love you. And it's the truth. This time.

ELEONORE

All right. Good to know.

EDWIN

That's all you've got?

ELEONORE

That's all I can muster.

EDWIN

I tell you "I love you" and all you can muster is "All right. Good to know."

ELEONORE

Admittedly, I'm a little thrown. You're generally predictable. And now this.

(Beat.)

How long have we been together?

EDWIN

I... I can't remember.

ELEONORE

Well, don't look so horrified. I can't remember either.

EDWIN

It's been a long time.

ELEONORE

Has it been?

EDWIN

I don't know. I'm guessing.

(He pushes his plate away.)

I've lost my appetite.

ELEONORE

I'm starving. Do you mind if I continue eating? Never mind. I don't know why I asked. I'm starving.

(A beat. She pokes at her fish.)

Where do you go? At night?

EDWIN

What do you mean?

ELEONORE

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night. I pass by your room and you're not there.

EDWIN

You're not sleeping through the night?

ELEONORE

Rarely.

EDWIN

You're taking your pills?

ELEONORE

Nothing helps. Maybe I should take the whole bottle.

EDWIN

I'm not sure that remark is appropriate. How do you think that makes me feel?

ELEONORE

Where do you go?

EDWIN

I take walks.

ELEONORE

Where?

EDWIN

Nearby. The park.

ELEONORE

It's risky.

EDWIN

A man can take walks. To clear his head. To breathe.

ELEONORE

To escape.

EDWIN

To escape, yes. What's wrong with that?

ELEONORE

You come back.

EDWIN
This is my home.

ELEONORE
Our home.

EDWIN
Our home.

ELEONORE
You'll be exposed.

EDWIN
I'm careful.

ELEONORE
You're the Senator for Wisconsin, for god's sake. How do you think that makes me feel?

EDWIN
You are more than compensated for your pains.

ELEONORE
I used to think so. I'm not so sure any more.
(A beat.)

EDWIN
How old are the kids?

ELEONORE
What?

EDWIN
Our kids. How old are they? If I knew how old our children were, I might be able to figure out how long we've been married.

ELEONORE
I don't know.

EDWIN
Think.

ELEONORE
When I said, "I don't know", what I meant was "I don't care".

EDWIN

I'm talking about our offspring here. Our flesh and blood. Our son and our daughter.

ELEONORE

Sons. We have two sons. We do not have a daughter. That much I do know. One from your first marriage. And one from... Well, somehow you and I managed to... procreate.

EDWIN

You're mistaken.

ELEONORE

No. I'm not. Look. There on the sideboard. There's a photo of the four of us. On... vacation... in... somewhere.

EDWIN

(He looks.)

I'll be damned. Two sons?

(She nods her head.)

No daughter?

(She shakes her head.)

I'll be damned. You're sure?

ELEONORE

Actually, no. I'm not sure.

(A beat.)

EDWIN

So, you're still having trouble sleeping.

ELEONORE

Sometimes, I pass out from exhaustion and crushing anxiety. And when I don't come to right away, I sleep.

EDWIN

You should see your doctor.

ELEONORE

Yesterday, I passed out in the back yard. I was gardening. I remember I'd just put in the last rose bush when everything went black.

EDWIN

Passing out is not a good sign. You should have that checked.

ELEONORE

...And while I lay there, unconscious in a pile of composted manure, I slept.

EDWIN

That's awful.

ELEONORE

I strongly suggest you cease taking late night walks.

(Lights to black.)

SCENE 2

(Lights up on a grand living room. A business mogul and his wife, the Senator's adoptive parents, are entertaining guests at a small pre-gala cocktail party. They are both slightly intoxicated.)

ABIGAIL

(To the guests.)

He was all alone.

ADDISON

He looked a little light in the loafers to me.

ABIGAIL

Please, dear, not in front of the guests.

(To the guests.)

He was eight years old.

ADDISON

And as soft as a chocolate teapot.

ABIGAIL

I had to have him.

ADDISON

The runt of the litter.

ABIGAIL

He turned out all right.

ADDISON

Senator for Wisconsin!

ABIGAIL

That's right! And you don't become Senator if you're as soft as a chocolate loafer, now do you?

ADDISON

You're mixing it up.

ABIGAIL

What do you mean?

ADDISON

Never mind.

(To the guests.)

It took a lot of hard work, but I turned that boy around.

ABIGAIL

More like you turned that boy over your knee.

ADDISON

Please, dear, not in front of the guests.

(To the guests.)

I've got a reputation for sternness. There's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with uncompromising discipline.

ABIGAIL

We think his birth parents were hippies.

ADDISON

Pot smoking, acid dropping liberals.

ABIGAIL

Shocking, but likely true.

ADDISON

There's no doubt in my mind. That boy got some kind of contact high from the hashish they were smoking.

ABIGAIL

All right, dear, no need to get graphic.

ADDISON

Irreversible damage to his brain. Screwed up his testosterone.

ABIGAIL

He turned out all right.

ADDISON

Senator for Wisconsin!

ABIGAIL

That's right! And you don't become Senator if you're brain damaged or limp wristed. Do you?

ADDISON

We had to pry a doll from his hands when we brought him home from the agency. He wouldn't let go of it.

ABIGAIL

Bubble Cut Barbie.

ADDISON

What?

ABIGAIL

Bubble Cut Barbie. A vintage 1963 honey blonde bubble cut Barbie doll. It was probably worth something, except that you tore off her head and ripped her arms and legs from her torso.

ADDISON

It had to be done.

ABIGAIL

And lit her on fire.

ADDISON

I may have gone too far. I think I made my point, though.

ABIGAIL

I still have a scar on my ankle from the lock of melted hair that fell from her scalp.

ADDISON

All right, dear, no need to get graphic.

ABIGAIL

We're extremely proud of our son.

ADDISON

He has a beautiful wife.

ABIGAIL

And two adoring..

ADDISON

Yes, indeed, his wife is beautiful. She could be one of those.. What do they call them? Power models?

ABIGAIL

Super model.

ADDISON

Super model, yes. She's stunning.

ABIGAIL

I think you might be overstating it a bit, dear. She's pleasant enough to look at, yes.

ADDISON

Gorgeous.

ABIGAIL

She certainly isn't repellent, I'll give her that much. Of course, she does otherwise possess the social graces of a howler monkey.

ADDISON

A toast! To our son!

ABIGAIL

To our son!

ADDISON

Senator for our great state of Wisconsin!

ABIGAIL

Oh! Oh, my goodness. Look at the time. We'd better get going.

ADDISON

Damn, I nearly forgot.

ABIGAIL

The gala starts in less than thirty minutes.

ADDISON

All right, everyone. Let's get a move on. The cars are waiting out front.

(Lights to black.)

SCENE 3

(Outside a government building. The Senator stands at a podium behind several microphones addressing the press. Eleonore is at his side.)

NEWSCASTER (VO)

Apologies for the interruption. I am just now getting word... Yes, Senator Edwin Spratt has made his way to the podium and is set to make a statement in response to the charge of lewd conduct, which was filed against him in relation to his arrest at a Minneapolis-St. Paul terminal restroom last month. We go live now to the Wisconsin State Office Building.

EDWIN

(Cameras flashing. Diminishing sounds of a murmuring crowd.)

Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming out today. For several weeks now, my family and I have been relentlessly harassed by the Wisconsin Statesman and mercilessly besieged by patently false and deliberately misleading statements made about me in the media. If you've opened any newspaper or magazine or if you've turned on any news station in the past week, you know what I'm talking about. Let me be clear. I am not now, nor have I ever been gay. Still, without any indisputable evidence to contradict my assertion that I am not homosexual, the Statesman has continued to engage in this flagrant lynching of my fine reputation. I was foolishly premature in pleading guilty to the charge of lewd conduct at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport on the day in question. It was a mistake and I deeply regret it. Because of that, I have now retained counsel and am asking my attorney to review these matters and advise me on how to proceed. In the very near future, I will make a formal announcement as to whether I will seek another term in office. As an elected official, I recognize that my personal and professional life is wide open to public scrutiny, and I take absolute responsibility for my lapse in judgment in attempting to manage this matter myself. I am not gay. I love my wife, my children, and my family. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues and I am immensely proud to serve this great state of Wisconsin, where I have accomplished a lot over the years. I have been in the political arena and in the public eye for seventeen years now. The simple truth of the matter is that I do not go around anywhere hitting on men. And, by God, if I did, I certainly wouldn't do it in a toilet stall at the airport.

(Lights to black.)

SCENE 4

(A modest apartment living room. Lucas and Leyla sit snugly on a small sofa. Leyla holds a remote in her hand. They have been watching the previous on TV.)

LEYLA

You want me to turn it off?

LUCAS

Maybe just mute it for now.

LEYLA

(She mutes the TV.)

What a mess, huh?

LUCAS

Yeah, of his own making.

LEYLA

Well, he's not fooling anyone.

LUCAS

He's convinced himself he's telling the truth. And his supporters - what's left of 'em - they don't care if he's telling the truth or not. And the GOP is in control right now. So what does it matter? They'll find a way to bury it.

LEYLA

Your mother looked... stoic.

LUCAS

Valium.

(Beat.)

LEYLA

Lucas...

(He's distracted.)

Lucas, are you okay?

LUCAS

No. No, I'm not okay. It's impossible not to feel a little angry right now. You know? Knowing that there are people out there who wish I didn't exist. Who wish you and I weren't together. People like my father; self-loathing elitist hypocrites in positions of power who

despise anyone who doesn't look like them or act like them. People who wanna cause suffering; who go through the trouble, who make it their life's mission to cause suffering. And for what? For money and for control. And what happens? People - children - are being put in cages. Or being beaten to death or shot down in the streets. Or they're taking their own lives. And it needs to fucking stop.

LEYLA

We also need to keep a level head right now...

LUCAS

Leyla...

LEYLA

...I mean it. I think the best thing any of us can do right now... during times of trauma, or of grief or pain, is to lead with love...

LUCAS

Come on...

LEYLA

...What's the alternative?

LUCAS

We kick some ass. And we keep kicking ass until we put an end to it?

LEYLA

An end to what? To people's suffering? Or the world?

LUCAS

I honestly don't think we'll ever have one without the other.

LEYLA

My point exactly. So, I choose to lead with love. It's all I know. And that can't be beaten out of me.

(Beat.)

I mean really, Lucas? An eye for an eye? That's so... Mesopotamian. And a lot of good it'll do. A bunch of angry people stumblin' around in the dark, takin' shots at one another. Which will only lead to collateral damage. Right? I mean, the people you're hopin' to protect are gonna be the ones who'll get hurt.

(Beat.)

And hey, listen... it's not like I'm gonna sit there and take it. You know? I'm gonna speak up. I'm gonna make sure my voice is heard. I'm gonna fight back. But I'm not gonna do it with my fists.

(A beat.)

LUCAS

All right. Okay. How about how this then? A little team work. You and me. You set 'em up with love. And I'll knock 'em down with these.

(He forms two fists.)

Whatta you say? Huh?

LEYLA

(She places both of her hands over his fists and gently pushes them down.)

I don't want any part of it.

(She kisses him.)

How do you feel now? Still angry?

LUCAS

Well, if that's what you mean by "leading with love", then I suppose I can take it under advisement.

(She kisses him again.)

LEYLA

And now?

LUCAS

I need more time to consider.

(She kisses him again.)

LEYLA

How about now?

(Lucas pulls a white handkerchief from his pocket and waves it as he and Leyla begin to kiss more passionately.)

(Lights to black.)

SCENE 5

(Eleonore's bedroom. She sits at a dressing table, getting ready for her husband's court appearance that day. A moment. Gregory appears.)

ELEONORE

Oh. You startled me, um...

GREGORY

...Gregory...

ELEONORE

Yes. Right. Of course. Gregory. I always get you and, um... Lauren...?

GREGORY

...Lucas...

ELEONORE

...Lucas. I always get the two of you confused.

GREGORY

Hardly seems possible.

ELEONORE

Does it? I mean all men are the same, aren't they?

GREGORY

Not anymore, they're not. Not Lucas and me, that's for sure.

ELEONORE

Well, maybe not physically, no. Maybe not... down there, no. But I mean emotionally. Intellectually. Men are all relatively underdeveloped in those areas. Right?

GREGORY

Fair enough.

ELEONORE

And thanks to modern medicine, women can now be that way too.

(She pops a pill.)

Can you help me with this necklace, please?

(She hands him a necklace. He comes behind her.)

GREGORY

(He inspects the necklace.)

This seems a little fancy for a trial, don't you think?

ELEONORE

What do you know from fancy?

GREGORY

Not much I guess. I was just thinking maybe something a little less shiny.

ELEONORE

When things get tense in the courtroom - and they will - I'll just put my hand to my neck to remind myself of how your father has provided for me. He'll appreciate that. And I'll have done what's expected of me.

(Beat.)

GREGORY

Does he beat you?

(Beat.)

ELEONORE

Put the necklace on, Gregory.

GREGORY

Does he?

ELEONORE

The necklace please.

GREGORY

(He inspects the necklace.)

It seems small.

ELEONORE

It's a choker. It's meant to fit snugly.

(Gregory puts the necklace on Eleonore.)

There. It's stunning, isn't it?

GREGORY

Yes.

(He means Eleonore. A moment. Both of his hands are now on or about her shoulders.)

Have you ever been with anyone other than dad?

ELEONORE

Your questions are inappropriate.

GREGORY

Your deflections are infuriating.

(Beat.)

ELEONORE

At least maybe I'd feel something if he did beat me.

(Beat.)

GREGORY

You should leave him.

(A moment.)

ELEONORE

I don't believe in forgiveness or tolerance. People are either in your life or they're not. You either acknowledge their existence or you don't. And the consequences of having them there or not there are yours to bear alone.

GREGORY

So, what? You just stick around to punish him? To remind him of what he's not? And of what he'll never be?

ELEONORE

I'd like to think I'm a little more complicated than that.

GREGORY

You deserve better. You deserve a man who's capable of taking care of you... who has the ability to satisfy you.

ELEONORE

Sounds to me like you may have a recommendation.

GREGORY

I might.

ELEONORE

It's amazing. You and your father... you're polar opposites. In fact, I can't think of any men more dissimilar than the two of you. And yet... and yet... you're both equally repulsive.

(Lights to black.)

SCENE 6

(A courtroom. Closed hearing. Eleonore and Gregory are seated to the side. The Senator is seated center. A Witness and a Police Officer sit on either side of him. Though they are seated adjacent to one another, their testimony is not happening simultaneously. Shifting lights should help to express this.)

RILEY

...So, uh... so, I got to the airport. I was running late as per usual. And, I uh... I got my ticket at the counter. I don't do the kiosk thing,

too impersonal, and I'm not very good with technology, makes me anxious. You know? So, anyway... I made it through security, and I got to the terminal. And then I made my way to the gate... where I got myself situated next to the sweetest little old lady with the cutest dog - a bichon, I think, both of them absolutely adorable. And then, I remember making eye contact with a nice-looking, well-dressed, guy who I immediately recognized was the Senator. And after a few minutes of the two of us... ogling one another, the Senator suddenly got up from where he's sitting, bag in tow, and started towards the men's room. But not the one at the gate. The one at the far end of the terminal where there's little to no foot traffic. Almost secluded. And he kept looking over his shoulder at me. I knew he wanted me to follow him. So, I did. When we got to the restroom, we stood next to one another at the urinals. I unzipped. He unzipped. And I could see... well, I could see that the Senator already had a... a hard-on. Pretty ballsy I thought, but what the hell? I was turned on. I mean, here I was with the Senator for Wisconsin and he was flashing me his... credentials.

NELSON

At about 7:00 PM on the date in question, I began working a plain clothes detail in a men's public restroom at the airport terminal, a restroom known for lewd sexual conduct. This particular restroom is situated at the far end of the terminal, just beyond a gate that was and is still under construction. I entered the men's room and, as I looked to the left, I observed two men standing at adjacent urinals. There was some fumbling as they both turned to see me. Their faces were flush, and they looked surprised and a little off guard. One of them looked familiar, but I wasn't able to place him at that moment. I walked past them and then proceeded to a vacant stall in the back of the restroom on the right.

RILEY

No sooner did I reach for the Senator's cock... Sorry, is it okay if I say cock? Anyway, as I reached for his shaft... shaft...? that sounds off... penis, his penis... another guy came into the restroom. Nice looking guy, well built, stocky, dark hair, blue eyes, nice ass... [*He has described Nelson*]. In any case, we were both surprised to see someone else in there. Though thinking back, I don't know why. I mean, it's a public john. Right? Look, I'm an openly gay guy who's resigned to forever being single. Okay? I mean, I've been cruising public parks and toilets for a very long time. My point is... as hot as this guy was who'd just come in and as turned on as I was to be screwing around with a politician, I could tell something wasn't right. Something serious was about to go down in that restroom and I wasn't about to stick around to find out what it was. I do have my limits. So, I zipped up and I hauled ass out of there.

NELSON

While seated in the stall, a white male with graying hair appeared just outside. The same gentleman who just minutes before was standing

at the urinal when I entered the restroom. He peered through the crack in the door, looked down at his hands, fidgeted with his fingers, moved closer, and then peered into my stall again. He repeated this for about two minutes. It was during that time that I realized who he was. The senator then entered the stall next to mine and placed his roller bag against the front of the stall door. From my position, I could observe his ankles and his feet. He was wearing tan dress pants with black dress shoes. Lavender argyle socks.

RILEY

Why did I come forward? Well, I did just take an oath on the big book of fiction after all, so I suppose I'm obligated to speak the truth. I came forward for two reasons: One... the senator of the great state of Wisconsin is a "mo" [homosexual] and everyone needs to know. Two... I'm hoping to get a date out of this. Thank you for allowing cameras in the courtroom.

NELSON

The senator tapped his right foot several times and then moved his foot closer to mine. I responded by moving my foot up and down slowly. He then placed his foot against mine. I did not respond, but just waited. He then swiped his hand under the stall divider in a direction from front to back. The palm of his hand was facing upwards as he guided it along the divider. And at that time, I was able to see the tips of his fingers on my side. I could see that it was his left hand due to the position of his thumb. I could then see that the senator had a gold band on his ring finger as his entire hand was now on my side of the stall divider. I then retrieved my Police Identification and held it in my right hand down by the floor so that the Senator could see it.

EDWIN

I sat down to use the toilet. Okay? I positioned my feet, yes. Maybe they were close to his. Maybe our feet bumped. I think maybe they did. He said as much. I don't disagree with that. But I don't recall exactly. I have to spread my legs when I lower my pants, so they don't slide. I'm a fairly wide guy. Yes, and at one point I believe I did reach down to pick up a piece of toilet paper behind me on the floor. As one does, I suppose. I mean, he in fact solicited me, isn't that the truth of the matter? I understand that he's out to enforce the law, but he shouldn't be out to entrap people. Okay, listen, I don't want to get into a pissing match here, but I mean, come on! This whole effort has been a calculated political hit. Revenge on behalf of my political opponents. It's a circus! And this officer is an accomplice to all of it. And if he's not, he's mistaken. In a misguided effort to become some kind of hero, his senses have failed him. He saw what he wanted to see. And this so-called witness - this pervert - he's just looking for publicity, looking for his fifteen minutes of fame. He's a liar. And one day, he'll come face to face with his maker. And he will have to answer for the choices he's made. This has nearly destroyed my

family and my good name. A name built up through years of hard work and dedicated public service. I swear today, under oath, before everyone in this room, and before God... I am innocent of these charges.

SCENE 7

(Lights up on a sitting room in Addison and Abigail's home. Addison is standing with a drink in his hand, perhaps smoking a cigar. Abigail is seated with a drink as well. Edwin and Eleonore sit next to one another on a love seat. Gregory sits or stands nearby.)

ADDISON

A misdemeanor charge of disorderly conduct and a \$575 fine. Do you know what that means, Edwin?

EDWIN

I expect that's a rhetorical question...

GREGORY

...It means you should've kept your mouth shut from the get-go. The entire world now knows that you're a raging faggot who likes to suck dick under toilet stalls in public restrooms. And all you had to do was plead no contest.

ADDISON

And no matter how much you protest... No matter how much you deny it... your family sees you for what you really are.

ABIGAIL

God sees you for what you really are, Edwin.

ELEONORE

I don't care that he's gay. I care that he's an idiot.

ABIGAIL

What a terrible thing to say, Eleonore. That is not how a wife responds when her husband's back is against the wall.

INCOMPLETE - MORE TO COME