

(DRAFT: 24 May 2020)

TETHERED

A play in one act
By Craig Houk



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Characters

EDWIN SPRATT: A US Circuit Judge (Late 50s)

ABIGAIL SPRATT: Edwin's Wife (Mid 50s)

Place

Bethesda, MD

Time

Present

SETTING: A dining room in the Spratt home.

AT RISE: Edwin and Abigail sit at opposite ends of a table eating dinner together. The faint tick tock of a grandfather clock can be heard off. Edwin appears distressed as he stares at his plate. A moment passes before he looks up at Abigail. He forces a tender smile. Abigail smiles back dimly, and then returns to her meal. Edwin continues smiling. This makes Abigail uncomfortable.

ABIGAIL

Are you going to answer me?

EDWIN

I love you.

(Beat.)

ABIGAIL

Where do you go at night, Edwin?

EDWIN

I do. I love you very much.

(Abigail sips her wine. Beat.)

ABIGAIL

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."

ABIGAIL

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

EDWIN

I mean it. This time.

ABIGAIL

This time?

EDWIN

Yes.

ABIGAIL

I see. And so, what do you mean by 'this time'? Are you saying that all previous 'I love yous' were meaningless?

EDWIN

No. Well, yes. But I've come to a realization recently. And I love you. And it's the truth. This time.

(Beat.)

What I mean to say is, it's taken me a long while to get to this point, but I'm there now. And I love you, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

So, you keep saying. All right. Good to know.

EDWIN

That's all you've got?

ABIGAIL

That's all I can muster.

EDWIN

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

ABIGAIL

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.

ABIGAIL

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

EDWIN

It's been a long time.

ABIGAIL

Has it?

EDWIN

I don't know. I'm guessing.

(He pushes his plate away.)

I've lost my appetite.

ABIGAIL

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

(She pokes at her fish. Beat.)

I'll ask again. Where do you go? When it's late?

EDWIN

I don't know what you mean?

ABIGAIL

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

EDWIN

You're not sleeping?

ABIGAIL

Rarely.

EDWIN

You're taking your pills?

ABIGAIL

(A bottle of pills sits near Abigail's place setting.)

Yes, but they don't help.

EDWIN

Take them anyway.

(Beat.)

ABIGAIL

Where do you go, Edwin?

EDWIN

For walks.

ABIGAIL

Where?

EDWIN

Nearby. Over in Battery Bailey.

ABIGAIL

It's risky.

EDWIN

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

ABIGAIL

To escape.

EDWIN

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

ABIGAIL

You come back.

(Beat.)

EDWIN

This is my home.

ABIGAIL

Our home.

EDWIN

Our home.

(Beat.)

I'm careful. Discreet.

ABIGAIL

You're putting your career and your reputation at stake. And in the middle of a contentious four-day hearing, Edwin. I mean, is it your intention to humiliate me?

(The grandfather clock ticks and tocks. Edwin looks off and then back at Abigail.)

EDWIN

That sound...

ABIGAIL

...Honestly, if you bring that up again, I swear to you I will throw myself through that window.

EDWIN

I've asked you repeatedly to have that monstrosity removed.

ABIGAIL

It is not a monstrosity. It is a grandfather clock. And an heirloom. And I will not get rid of it.

EDWIN

I'm sorry, but I can't bear it. The endless ticking and tocking...

ABIGAIL

(She rises out of her chair.)

...Should I just throw myself off the roof then? Is that what you want?

EDWIN

Sit down.

(Abigail does not move.)

Sit down. Please.

(Abigail sits. Beat.)

How old are the children?

ABIGAIL

What does that have to do...?

EDWIN

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

ABIGAIL

I don't know.

EDWIN

Think.

ABIGAIL

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.

ABIGAIL

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.

ABIGAIL

No. I'm not. Look. There on the sideboard. There's a picture 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?

ABIGAIL

No. I'm not sure. Perhaps that photo came with the frame.

(Beat.)

Listen, Edwin. I need you to stop going...

EDWIN

...Why do you think you're not sleeping?

ABIGAIL

I didn't say I wasn't sleeping. I said that I rarely sleep. Sometimes, I just pass out from the crushing anxiety. And when I don't come to right away, that's when I sleep.

EDWIN

You should see your doctor.

ABIGAIL

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

...You should have that checked...

ABIGAIL

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

EDWIN

That's awful.

ABIGAIL

I strongly suggest you cease taking late night walks.

EDWIN

Enough. Put it out of your mind.

(Beat.)

ABIGAIL

All men are the same, aren't they?

EDWIN

That's not true.

ABIGAIL

Well, maybe not physically, no. Maybe not down there, no. I mean, some men are well-endowed, and some men are underdeveloped..

EDWIN

..Enough..

ABIGAIL

..But emotionally speaking; intellectually speaking.. All men are underdeveloped in those areas. Right? And now thanks to modern medicine, women can be that way too.

(Abigail pops a pill. Beat.)

EDWIN

Just one more day of hearings, Abigail. I need you to be patient and supportive. Please.

(Beat.)

ABIGAIL

What do you think of this necklace?

EDWIN

I think it's lovely. That's why I bought it.

ABIGAIL

I was contemplating wearing it tomorrow.

EDWIN

Seems a little extravagant.

ABIGAIL

You think so?

EDWIN

I do. Perhaps something a little less flashy. Or maybe no necklace at all. We don't want the general public to get the wrong impression.

ABIGAIL

I think I'll wear it. And when things get tense - and they will - I'll just put my hand to my neck to remind myself of how you've provided for me. You'll appreciate that, won't you? And I'll have done what's expected of me.

(Beat.)

EDWIN

Whatever makes you happy. But remember, there's nothing to worry about. The Senate will vote to confirm.

ABIGAIL

Despite the allegation.

EDWIN

A partisan attack. And anyway, it's not true.

ABIGAIL

Well, of course it's not true; technically speaking. I mean, she's not your type, now is she? But you were there. All those years ago. You saw what happened.

EDWIN

What difference does it make? It wasn't me.

ABIGAIL

But it was you. Because when they asked for a name, Edwin, she gave them yours. Because your face is the face she remembers. And everything she experienced: the pain, the fear, the shame... it was all real. It happened. And what does it say about your character that when she relives that nightmare, all she can remember is you?

EDWIN

She's a liar.

(Beat.)

ABIGAIL

All men are the same.

EDWIN

She'll be forgotten in a week.

ABIGAIL

Your name will be forever tied to hers. Your face will be forever tied to her anguish. History will not be kind to you. And neither will I.

EDWIN

I don't need you to be kind. I need you to be quiet.

(Edwin looks off. The grandfather clock ticks and tocks.)

I want that thing gone by tomorrow.

ABIGAIL

It stays. It reminds me that time is still trudging forward. And that one day, you and I will come to an end.

(End of Play.)