

# **TETHERED**

A playlet  
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

On the eve of his confirmation to SCOTUS, Edwin Spratt and his wife, Abigail, sit down for an intimate dinner that quickly turns contentious. Edwin has been accused of sexual assault. He can prove his innocence, but it would require revealing a secret that would anger his supporters and put his career and reputation at stake.

Characters

**EDWIN SPRATT** A US Circuit Judge (Mid 50s)

**ABIGAIL SPRATT** Edwin's Wife (Early 50s)

Place

Bethesda, MD

Time

Present

Setting

A dining room in the Spratt home.

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*Edwin and Abigail sit at opposite ends of a dinner table. A bottle of pills sits at Abigail's place setting. 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.*

**ABIGAIL**

Are you going to answer me, Edwin?

**EDWIN**

I love you.

**ABIGAIL**

Where do you go at night?

**EDWIN**

I do. I love you very much.

*(Abigail sips her wine.)*

**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 you" 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. 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. *(Pause.)* 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, Edwin. I mean, you're generally predictable. And now this. *(Pause.)* How long have we been together?

**EDWIN**

I... I can't remember.

**ABIGAIL**

Well, don't look so terrified. I can't remember either. Which is why I'm asking.

**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.)*

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**

Yes, but they don't help.

**EDWIN**

Take them anyway.

**ABIGAIL**

Where do you go, Edwin?

*(Pause.)*

**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.

*(Pause.)*

**EDWIN**

This is my home.

**ABIGAIL**

Our home.

**EDWIN**

Our home. 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 to 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.)*

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.)*

How old are the children?

**ABIGAIL**

What on earth does that have to do with--

**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...

**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?

*(Abigail nods her head.)*

No daughter?

*(Abigail shakes her head.)*

I'll be damned. You're sure?

*(Pause.)*

**ABIGAIL**

No. I'm not sure. Perhaps that photo came with the frame. *(Pause.)* 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 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.

*(Pause.)*

**EDWIN**

That's awful.

**ABIGAIL**

I strongly suggest you cease taking late night walks.

**EDWIN**

Enough. Put it out of your mind.

**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.)*

**EDWIN**

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

*(Pause.)*

**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 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.

**EDWIN**

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

**ABIGAIL**

Despite the allegations.

**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 that fateful evening: the pain,

the fear, the shame... It was 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.

*(Pause.)*

**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, Edwin. 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.

*(Pause.)*

**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.)*