

# **TETHERED**

A playlet  
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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## Synopsis

A retired business mogul, Addison Spratt, and his wife Eleonore are hosting a cocktail party at their stately mansion. Heavily intoxicated, the pair unwittingly reveal curious details about their son's childhood, which raises some questions about his virility.

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.

A year or more into his seating on the Supreme Court, Edwin Spratt is questioned by DCA airport authorities.

## Characters

**ADDISON SPRATT** Edwin's Adoptive Father (Late 70s)

**ELEONORE SPRATT** Edwin's Adoptive Mother (Mid 70s)

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

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

## Place

Bethesda, MD

## Time

Present

## Setting

A Grand Parlor in Addison and Eleonore's Mansion, a Dining Room in Edwin and Abigail's home, and a Room at DCA Airport Security.

## Staging Notes

Each section of this play is broken into scenes, however, transitions from one to the next should be executed as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

**SCENE 1**

*(Lights up on a business mogul, Addison Spratt, and his wife, Eleonore Spratt, a US Circuit Judge's adoptive parents, who are entertaining guests at a small pre fundraising gala cocktail party in the grand parlor of their mansion. They are both inebriated.)*

**ELEONORE**

He was all alone.

**ADDISON**

He looked light in the loafers to me.

**ELEONORE**

Eight years old.

**ADDISON**

And as soft as a chocolate teapot.

**ELEONORE**

I had to have him.

**ADDISON**

The runt of the litter.

**ELEONORE**

He turned out all right.

**ADDISON**

I should say so. And he'll soon be an Associate Justice to the United States Supreme Court.

**ELEONORE**

That's right. And you don't become a Supreme Court Justice if you're as soft as a chocolate loafer, now do you?

**ADDISON**

You're mixing them up, dear.

**ELEONORE**

What do you mean?

**ADDISON**

You've mixed them up. You've combined "light in the loafers" with "soft as a chocolate teapot".

**ELEONORE**

Did I?

**ADDISON**

Yes.

**ELEONORE**

I see. Well, what does it matter anyway? Everyone knows what we're saying. I mean, let's be honest; we thought for certain he'd grow up to be a brownie queen.

**ADDISON**

All right, dear. Anyway, it took a lot of hard work, but I turned that boy around.

**ELEONORE**

You turned him over your knee.

**ADDISON**

Please, Eleonore, not in front of the guests. All right, yes, I've got a reputation for sternness. But there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with uncompromising discipline.

**ELEONORE**

We think his birth parents were hippies.

**ADDISON**

Pot smoking, acid dropping liberals.

**ELEONORE**

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. Irreversible brain damage. Screwed up his testosterone.

**ELEONORE**

He turned out all right.

**ADDISON**

US Circuit Judge.

**ELEONORE**

And soon to be Associate Justice to the United States Supreme Court.

**ADDISON**

And you don't get to be a Supreme Court Justice if you're brain damaged or limp wristed, now do you?

**ELEONORE**

I suppose not, dear.

## **SCENE 2**

*(Lights up on Edwin and Abigail who sit at opposite ends of a dinner table in their home. 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. 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. 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.

### **SCENE 3**

*(Lights up on Addison and Eleonore. Continuous from Scene 1.)*

**ADDISON**

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

**ELEONORE**

Bubble Cut Barbie.

**ADDISON**

I'm sorry, what?

**ELEONORE**

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

**ADDISON**

It had to be done.

**ELEONORE**

...And lit it on fire.

**ADDISON**

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

**ELEONORE**

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

**ADDISON**

All right, dear, no need to get graphic.

**ELEONORE**

We're extremely proud of our son.

**ADDISON**

He has a beautiful wife.

**ELEONORE**

And two adoring—

**ADDISON**

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

**ELEONORE**

Super model.

**ADDISON**

Super model, yes. She's stunning.

**ELEONORE**

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

**ADDISON**

Gorgeous.

**ELEONORE**

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

**ADDISON**

That's entirely inaccurate.

**ELEONORE**

Is it?

**ADDISON**

And even so, turkeys are beautiful birds. So, there's that.



**ELEONORE**

There's what, dear?

**ADDISON**

Turkeys. They're spectacular creatures.

**ELEONORE**

If you say so, dear.

**ADDISON**

I do say so.

**ELEONORE**

So, that's settled then. Oh, which reminds me. Did you know, there's a farm nearby that gives customers the opportunity to slaughter their own turkeys?

**ADDISON**

You've gone off track, dear.

**ELEONORE**

*(Quietly, aside.)*

I'll need to bookmark that.

#### **SCENE 4**

*(Lights up on Edwin and Abigail. Continuous from Scene 2.)*

**EDWIN**

*(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.

## **SCENE 5**

*(Lights up on Addison and Eleonore. Continuous from Scene 3.)*

**ADDISON**

*(He raises his glass.)*

A toast!

**ELEONORE**

*(She raises her glass.)*

Oh, yes. Of course. A toast! To... To what, dear?

**ADDISON**

To our son. To Edwin James Spratt.

**ELEONORE**

Yes, of course. To Edwin Xavier Spratt.

**ADDISON**

The next US Supreme Court Justice.

**ELEONORE**

If he gets confirmed.

**ADDISON**

Yes, if he gets... I'm sorry, what, dear?

**ELEONORE**

Well, of course, there's no guarantee that he'll actually be seated.

**ADDISON**

Nonsense.

**ELEONORE**

Pish posh.

**ADDISON**

Claptrap.

**ELEONORE**

Twaddle. No, but really, dear. Edwin is not exceedingly popular with the Democrats, now, is he?

**ADDISON**

Well, none of us are. It's a badge of honor, though, isn't it?

**ELEONORE**

One we wear proudly.

**ADDISON**

Exactly. So, there's nothing to worry about, now is there?

**ELEONORE**

I suppose not.

**ADDISON**

And anyway, we control the Senate.

**ELEONORE**

That's a fair point. But things could get ugly, dear. Very ugly.

**ADDISON**

Ugly is an ugly word, Eleonore. We are not pessimists. We are not doom-mongers. We are not quitters. And we most certainly are not losers. We are winners. And in fact, we are going to win so much that you're all going to be so damned exhausted from all the winning.

**ELEONORE**

I'm exhausted already.

**ADDISON**

Well, that's ridiculous. The night is still young. We have so much to celebrate. And several of our closest acquaintances have joined us this evening to mark the occasion in case you haven't noticed. So, the night goes on as planned. What do you say to that, dear?

**ELEONORE**

I say, "The night may be young, but we're not."

**ADDISON**

Buck up, dear. And drink up. It's nearly time to go.

**ELEONORE**

Oh, you're right. The gala starts in less than an hour.

**ADDISON**

Tell you what. Now that we've made our toast, and everyone seems to be suitably juiced, why don't we take a short break, have another drink or two, help yourselves to more hors d'oeuvres, mingle, use the water closet if you must, insult the servants, and then we'll gather in the motor court in about forty minutes.

**ELEONORE**

Sounds like a fantastic plan, dear.

**ADDISON**

Yes. And if you need access to your hosts in the meantime, Eleonore and I will be in the study.

**ELEONORE**

That's right. Addison and I will be in the... I'm sorry, where, dear?

**ADDISON**

The study.

**ELEONORE**

The study?

**ADDISON**

That's what I said.

**ELEONORE**

Sounds ominous.

**ADDISON**

Does it? I didn't mean for it to sound that way.

**ELEONORE**

Of course, you didn't.

## **SCENE 6**

*(Lights up on Edwin and Abigail. Continuous from Scene 4.)*

**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 a family 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.

## **SCENE 7**

*(Lights up on Addison and Eleonore who are now in the study. Continuous from Scene 5.)*

**ELEONORE**

Is something wrong, Addison?

**ADDISON**

Yes, something is wrong. Something is off. You made a complete fool of yourself out there.

**ELEONORE**

I did? How?

**ADDISON**

You said too much.

**ELEONORE**

As did you if I recall correctly.

**ADDISON**

I disagree. My remarks were perfectly nuanced and decisively misleading. Everything I said, I said in jest. You, on the other hand, accused our son outright of being a homosexual, and his wife of being a foul fowl. And in front of our nearest and dearest confederates, no less.



**ELEONORE**

Perhaps I'm mistaken, but I'm fairly certain you contributed considerably to those topics as well.

**ADDISON**

Hogwash.

**ELEONORE**

Hoey.

**ADDISON**

Flapdoodle.

**ELEONORE**

Applesauce. I want a divorce, Addison.

**ADDISON**

You'll get no such thing. You haven't earned it. You're miserable. You're weak. You're outdated. You're virtually useless. And what's more, no one else will have you.

**ELEONORE**

Sticks and stones, dear.

**ADDISON**

If only I had both right now.

**ELEONORE**

So, that's decided then?

**ADDISON**

Unquestionably.

**ELEONORE**

No divorce?

**ADDISON**

That's right.

**ELEONORE**

Frankly, I'm relieved. I mean, I really don't know what I'd do without you, Addison. I crave purpose, as you know. And without you, I have none.

**ADDISON**

That's the God's truth. And without me, there'd be no one around to remind you of your appointed position in life. So, unless otherwise instructed, it's best to stay quiet and let the men lead.

**ELEONORE**

Agreed.

**ADDISON**

I have an idea.

**ELEONORE**

You do?

**ADDISON**

We can fix this.

**ELEONORE**

How?

**ADDISON**

It's very simple. In the end, we maintain the power, the influence, and the money in this country. Am I right?

**ELEONORE**

Always.

**ADDISON**

Which means there's nothing that we can't undo. So, just follow my lead.

## **SCENE 8**

*(Lights up on Edwin and Abigail. Continuous from Scene 6.)*

**ABIGAIL**

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**

Put it out of your mind.

**ABIGAIL**

One day you'll be exposed.

**EDWIN**

Enough.

**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**

I said, 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.

**SCENE 9**

*(Lights up on Addison and Eleonore who have just returned to the grand parlor. Continuous from Scene 7.)*

**ADDISON**

Excuse me. Yes, hello, can I have everyone's attention, please? Thank you. My precious wife, Eleonore, and I would like to take this moment to formally welcome all of you to our modest estate. We are thankful for your attendance at our festive little cocktail party, and we are especially grateful that you have consented to be our guests at tonight's fundraising event to be held at the Four Seasons. Now of course, we don't want to take up too much of your time. After all, we did invite you here to unwind a bit and to loosen up before you're compelled to part with a small fraction of your acquired wealth. Rest assured, though, it's all for a particularly fitting cause. A cause that, in the end, will in fact benefit each of you in significant ways. I've made sure of that. Now, before we give you all a little time to yourselves to perhaps have another drink or two, or to maybe help yourselves to more hors d'oeuvres, or to mingle, or to use the water closet if you must, or to insult the servants, we would like to make a special toast. To our son, Edwin James Spratt.

**ELEONORE**

To Edwin James Spratt.

**ADDISON**

Soon to be Associate Justice to the United States Supreme Court.

**ELEONORE**

We couldn't be prouder.

**ADDISON**

I knew, from the moment the wet nurse presented him to me, that Edwin would one day make an impact, that he would serve all of us in upholding moral order, and to protecting our customs and conventions, to securing permanency, to being prudent and firm, and to showing great restraint—

**ELEONORE**

He certainly showed great restraint when I gave birth to him, didn't he, dear?

**ADDISON**

He sure did.

**ELEONORE**

Nearly three days in labor. And a very big boy, wasn't he, Addison?

**ADDISON**

Nine pounds, four ounces.

**ELEONORE**

Our little man.

**ADDISON**

Our little alpha.

**ELEONORE**

As sturdy as an oak.

**ADDISON**

As smart as a fox.

**ELEONORE**

As handsome as a ransom.

**ADDISON**

As white as snow.

**SCENE 10**

*(Lights up on Edwin and Abigail. Continuous from Scene 8.)*

**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.

**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.

**ABIGAIL**

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

## **SCENE 11**

*(Lights up on Edwin who is being informally questioned by authorities at airport security.)*

**EDWIN**

You do know who I am, right? Never mind. I know you do because if you didn't, none of this would be happening. Because I am being targeted here. Okay? And I strongly suspect that you're all in on it. So, maybe you'll just give me a chance to respond then? Hm? Because I do have a

response to all of this goddam nonsense. But I can't be... I won't be interrupted. Have I made myself clear?

*(Beat.)*

So, yes. I sat down to use the toilet. Okay? I mean, that's what one does when nature calls, right? And I positioned my feet, yes. Maybe they were close to his, maybe our feet bumped, I think maybe they did. He said as much, and I don't disagree with that, but I don't recall exactly. You see, I have to spread my legs when I lower my pants, so that they don't slide down. I mean, I'm a fairly wide guy, as I'm sure you can tell by looking at me. And yes, at one point I believe I did reach down to pick up – I don't know – maybe a piece of toilet paper or something behind me on the floor. As one does, I suppose. But at no time did I put my hand under the stall. That's ridiculous.

*(Beat.)*

I mean, it was him who in fact solicited me, isn't that the truth of the matter? And I get that he's out to enforce the law, but he shouldn't be out to entrap people. And listen, I don't want to get into a pissing match here. Okay? But I mean, come on. This whole effort is clearly a calculated political hit, which is what I mean when I say to you that I'm being targeted. It's a fucking circus. And this, this... What is he, an undercover officer...? He's an accomplice to all of it. And if he's not an accomplice, then he's sorely mistaken. In a misguided effort to become some kind of hero, his senses have failed him. Okay? He saw what he wanted to see. But you know what? None of this really matters anyway because I did nothing wrong.

*(Beat.)*

Nevertheless... if this gets out – and let me remind you that none of it's true – but if this does get out, it will destroy my family and ruin my good name. A name that I've built up through years of hard work and dedicated public service. And let me be clear. I am not now, nor have I ever been homosexual. Okay? Be that as it may, it's becoming increasingly clear to me that without any indisputable evidence to contradict my assertion that I am not homosexual, you're just going to continue to engage in this flagrant lynching of my fine reputation, isn't that the truth of the matter? Well, isn't it?

*(Beat.)*

I love my wife, my children, and my family. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues, and I am immensely proud to have had the extraordinary opportunity to serve this great nation, where I have accomplished a lot over the years, and where I plan to accomplish so much more. I have been in the political arena and in the public eye for many, many years now. So, I need you to listen to me, and listen to me very carefully... 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.

*(End of play.)*