

PARTING WISHES

By Carl L. Williams

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A One Act Drama

by Carl L. Williams

SYNOPSIS: Three estranged half-sisters gather for the reading of their mother’s will. Old resentments against their mother and disagreements among themselves keep these very different women in conflict until they listen one final time to what their mother has to say.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females)

- JESSICA WYATT.....30’s; oldest sister, superior and distant attitude. (73 lines)
- MAGGIE OWENS20’s, middle sister, outgoing and wisecracking. (75 lines)
- ZEE FITZGERALDEarly 20’s, youngest sister, high-spirited and moody. (41 lines)
- ALICE COMPTONAssociate attorney in a law office. (40 lines)

DURATION: 20 minutes.

SETTING: A conference room at a law office.

SET: Four chairs widely separated with no other furniture.

TIME: Present.

PROPS

- ☐ Folder
- ☐ Will Document

COSTUMES

JESSICA – Formal business attire, wears a watch.

MAGGIE – Casual business attire.

ZEE – Sloppy attire.

ALICE – Formal business attire.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The characters do not necessarily have to stay seated in the four chairs after the attorney directs them to sit down. Any additional movement remains at the discretion of the director.

AT RISE: *JESSICA is waiting in a room devoid of furniture except for four chairs, widely separated. MAGGIE enters.*

MAGGIE: Jessica. I should've known you'd get here early.

JESSICA: Our appointment is in three minutes. I'd hardly call that early.

MAGGIE: Yeah, but how long have you been waiting?

JESSICA: That's not germane.

MAGGIE: Nobody but you ever uses a word like germane.

JESSICA: Educated people do.

MAGGIE: I'm educated. I just try not to show it.

JESSICA: You succeed.

MAGGIE: (*Looks around.*) So what's with the chairs? The secretary told me this was a conference room.

JESSICA: I asked her about that. She said this was how the lawyer instructed the room to be.

MAGGIE: Well, it's screwy. What do you know about this lawyer? Alice Compton.

JESSICA: Only what was in her letter. I assume she sent all three of us the same notice.

MAGGIE: It wasn't very personal, was it? Considering the topic. I don't imagine Zee has shown up yet, has she?

JESSICA: When have you ever known Zee to be on time?

MAGGIE: She better get here soon. We're about to start.

JESSICA: No, we're not.

MAGGIE: What do you mean? Our appointment is for ten o'clock.

JESSICA: The secretary said Miss Compton wouldn't join us until we're all here.

MAGGIE: Oh, that's just great.

JESSICA: You'd think Zee would make an exception and come on time for something this important, wouldn't you?

MAGGIE: I'd think, and you'd think, but Zee doesn't think.

JESSICA: She thinks. Just not in any normal way.

MAGGIE: Normal being defined as the way you think, I suppose.

JESSICA: Not really. Normal is more like a mediocre average. Most people would call you normal, Maggie.

MAGGIE: I won't say what most people call you.

JESSICA: Your humor would be cutting if it weren't so dull.

MAGGIE: All right, all right. Save some of your acid for Zee. Do you have her cell phone number?

JESSICA: (*Repelled by the suggestion.*) No. Do you?

MAGGIE: No.

JESSICA: At least we share a certain amount of good sense.

MAGGIE: And so we wait.

JESSICA: Isn't that what we've been doing these last few months? Waiting for the inevitable.

MAGGIE: For a while there I thought she might get better. So did Zee.

JESSICA: Optimism like that is not only misplaced, but delusional.

MAGGIE: And what is pessimism?

JESSICA: Practical.

MAGGIE: Any clues to what the lawyer's going to tell us?

JESSICA: On that one subject, I know as little as you do.

MAGGIE: I doubt if we'll get very much. Do you?

JESSICA: Being "practical"...no.

MAGGIE: If any of us gets anything, I expect it'll be Zee. She probably expects that, too.

JESSICA: If so, expectation hasn't improved her punctuality. (*Checks her watch.*) I understand this room is reserved for one hour.

MAGGIE: Surely it doesn't take an hour to read a will.

JESSICA: No doubt the lawyer is reserving time for explanations and arguments.

MAGGIE: What's to explain? And what's the use of arguing? It can't be changed.

JESSICA: You may not embrace pessimism, Maggie, but you have a healthy amount of fatalism.

MAGGIE: I never knew it was healthy. I feel so much better.

ZEE enters quickly, exuding energy.

ZEE: Hi, you two! Made it right on time, didn't I?

JESSICA: Not unless your watch is slow.

MAGGIE: We've been waiting for you, Zee, so we can get started.

ZEE: Okay, I'm here. Let's get started! (*Looks around.*) Where's all the furniture?

MAGGIE: They had a rummage sale and you missed all the bargains.

ZEE glares.

MAGGIE: All right, we don't know. This is how we found it.

JESSICA: Presumably the secretary has informed Miss Compton we've all arrived.

ZEE: Have you met her yet?

MAGGIE: No. I never even heard of her until I got the letter.

JESSICA: She apparently works for Craig Schuster.

ZEE: Mother joked that Schuster was a dangerous name for a lawyer, because somebody might call him Schuster the Shyster!

JESSICA: I believe what Mother called him was "darling."

MAGGIE: And Mother certainly wouldn't date a shyster.

JESSICA: Give her credit for that. She always chose men with legitimate professions.

MAGGIE: More legitimate than some of her intentions toward them.

ZEE: You two are horrid. Mother gave her heart to every one of them.

JESSICA: More like a short-term loan.

MAGGIE: Or like a librarian checking out a popular book. Two weeks later she's got it back and loaning it out again.

ZEE: That's a total lie! Well...the two weeks part is, anyway.

JESSICA: Mother's little excuser. "She didn't mean this...she didn't mean that...she didn't mean anything at all by anything she did."

ZEE: Stop it!

MAGGIE: You stop it. Stop being a baby.

JESSICA: (*Regarding her sisters.*) A baby, a teenager, and I'm the adult.

MAGGIE: Being the oldest doesn't make you anything but older.

JESSICA: There's an intelligent remark.

ZEE: You're a know-it-all, aren't you!

JESSICA: I'm a know-more-of-it-than-you-do. More about Mother than either one of you, because I was around longer and saw more than you did.

ZEE: Mother loved us!

MAGGIE: Mother loved everybody, with the result that her love was too divided to count for much. We got smaller and smaller slivers of it.

ZEE: That was your choice, not hers!

JESSICA: (*To MAGGIE.*) Our sister is what literature refers to as a “wise child.”

MAGGIE: My guess would’ve been “smart aleck.”

JESSICA: She’s wise beyond her years. She knows so much, despite having learned so little.

ZEE: You always did make fun of me.

JESSICA: Isn’t that what sisters are for?

MAGGIE: I wondered what it was.

ALICE enters with a file folder, interrupting.

ALICE: Ladies. Good morning. I’m Alice Compton. Please take a seat. Anywhere is fine. Any one of the chairs.

ALICE sits down as JESSICA, MAGGIE, and ZEE each select a chair. ZEE heads for one, but gets cut off by MAGGIE and settles on another one.

JESSICA: Isn’t this somewhat unusual?

ALICE: Yes, it is. But we’ll get to that in a minute. Although I know your names, I don’t know who is who.

JESSICA: I’m Jessica Wyatt.

MAGGIE: Maggie Owens. Margaret.

ZEE: And I’m Zee Fitzgerald.

ALICE: Oh, yes. Zee for Zelda. Zelda Fitzgerald.

JESSICA: Our mother had a certain flair that burned brighter as she aged.

MAGGIE: When she married Roy Fitzgerald, she couldn’t resist calling our new little sister Zelda.

ZEE: It’s not a bad name.

JESSICA: Overlooking the fact the original Zelda went insane.

ALICE: I can understand why you go by “Zee.”

ZEE: Well, your name is Alice...did anyone ever call you Alice in Wonderland?

ALICE: No. Though occasionally I may have felt that’s where I was.

MAGGIE: Before we go any farther down this rabbit hole, could you tell us why you’re the one handling our mother’s will?

ALICE: Certainly. Your mother in recent years had engaged Hartwell, Mansfield, Doyle and Schuster for her legal affairs. (*hesitates*) As you may be aware, she became, well, friends with Mr. Schuster.

JESSICA: With the number four partner? I'm surprised.

ALICE: Hartwell is deceased, Mansfield is in his 80's, and Doyle is a woman.

MAGGIE: Simple process of elimination.

ZEE: Maybe she just liked him better!

JESSICA: Better than Miss Doyle, you mean?

ZEE: You know what I mean!

MAGGIE: One thing you can say for Mother, she managed to stay active.

JESSICA: Very.

ALICE: About the will. Because of Mr. Schuster's personal friendship with your mother, he thought it best if I handled this particular aspect and dealt with the three of you myself.

MAGGIE: The coward.

ALICE: I have to say, just looking at the three of you, I see no family resemblance.

JESSICA: That's what comes from having three different fathers.

ZEE: But she was married to all three of them!

MAGGIE: We're kind of like the Cartwrights.

ALICE: Who?

MAGGIE: You know—on Bonanza. Except they had one father and three different mothers.

JESSICA: You realize, as the middle sibling, that would make you Hoss.

MAGGIE: Fine. Hoss was the one everybody liked best. Adam left the show early, kind of like you left the family.

JESSICA: I went away to college.

MAGGIE: Far away.

ZEE: (*Pouting.*) Not far enough.

JESSICA: Thank you, Little Joe.

ALICE: I take it the family wasn't...close?

JESSICA: You take it correctly.

ZEE: I was close. Mother and I were close after the two of them were long gone.

MAGGIE: I wasn't that long gone. I kept in touch.

ZEE: You had to be there to be in touch.

ALICE: Perhaps we should concentrate on the matter at hand, which is of course your mother's will.

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