

# **SOME UNFINISHED CHAOS**

**a sad comedy**

**by**

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## ***SOME UNFINISHED CHAOS***

### **CHARACTERS:**

ERIC WITTENGER - 39, British and mannered. At 22, he had published his major novel; and he's spent the last 17 years trying to write another. Whether he can, he doubts by this time; but -- because it's the only substantial success he's ever known -- he keeps trying. The novel made him rich and famous; the richness has dissipated, but the fame, to some extent, still remains, though now it's as much a source of discomfort as of pleasure: The reminders of who he "was" have come to gnaw at him, particularly because his income depends on it: He gives lectures and interviews; and, only once in a while, produces an article or short story. Nonetheless, his sense of humor -- wry, reserved and not without acerbity -- is usually present and truly his own.

JESSAMYN TYLER - 23 -- a mature 23, but 23 nonetheless; American, curious and, at least in her personal life, a product of her generation: Outgoing, casual, aggressive and not easily intimidated. She is also something of a victim of her admiration for creative types. At present she works as a secretary; when she graduated from Hunter or UCLA or Northwestern, BA, Lit, she applied for the standard jobs and was asked the standard questions: She answered "70 words per minute" and was hired. She didn't -- and doesn't -- mind - for the moment: Though her life is, frankly, boring, she isn't quite brave enough to toss off the security it provides and just dive in, probably because she hasn't committed yet to what she wants to do -- if asked, she'd probably say she's "exploring the possibilities" -- but she thinks she might like to write.

**Notes:** Jessamyn is defined in the text as American, but there is no reason why she cannot be of European, Central or South American, African or Asian descent. If minoir text changes are needed to accomplish this, please consult the playwright. Moreover, the play may be set anywhere except the UK (Eric must be an expatriate).

The play calls for Eric to smoke, and it's an essential characteristic of his development. Given, however, that many theatres and municipalities have policies and/or ordinances prohibiting the use of lit smoking materials on stage (and, of course, actors' understandable reluctance to smoke), a company should feel free to use theatrical prop cigarettes which will give the appropriate impression without the use of tobacco.

### Production/award history

PRODUCTIONS: Danna Semo Productions, Givataim, Israel  
API Theatre, Kalamazoo, MI  
Equity Library Theatre Chicago

HONORS: "Top Ten" selection - Chattanooga (TN) New Play Festival  
Semi-finalist, Writer's Network Competition  
Finalist, Trustus (SC) Theatre New Play Competition  
Finalist, National Future Fest, Dayton, OH

***Some Unfinished Chaos***  
***a sad comedy***  
**synopsis**

This is a two-character (1F: 23, American; 1M: 39, British), single set (two-room interior) “sad comedy,” set in the late 20th century, about the growth of the soul and learning to live in the face of death. It takes place over a six-month period and requires no unusual technical or physical effects. The play is in three acts and has a running time of approximately 1:45 plus intermissions.

*Chaos* concerns the never-explicitly defined relationship that evolves between ERIC WITTENGER, a writer whose successful -- sole -- novel was published when he was 22, and who has been trying ever since to create another. That novel -- based, as we discover during the play, on the turmoil of his brief marriage and his ex-wife’s descent into eventual suicide -- was a huge success, and it still provides his principal, though now modest, means of support, a fact which continues to grate on him; and JESSAMYN TYLER, a would-be writer who is estranged from her father but was close to her recently deceased mother, and who steadily inserts herself into Eric’s life, over his reluctance, in the hope, at first at least, that he will mentor her writing

The nature of the relationship is changed, however, when Eric, who works to retain his emotional distance from the world to avoid repeating the failures of his marital relationship, discovers he is terminally ill (with cancer) and is forced to re-examine his personal and professional needs; and Jessamyn, in an effort that is based both on her own needs and her growing attachment -- professional and emotional -- to Eric, convinces him to allow her to move in with him to become his primary caregiver.

The play explores the ways people create -- and sometimes destroy -- in order to survive, physically and spiritually, and deals with what its characters face in coming to terms not only with Eric’s mortality but their own respective fears, hopes; and desires, as artists, to give something to each other and to the world at large.

Your books were in your desk  
I guess and some unfinished  
Chaos in your head  
Was dumped to nothing by the great janitress  
Of destinies.

--- F. Scott Fitzgerald

Dedicated to the memory of Raymond Carver

This is for Grace Aiello: People often say “I couldn’t have done it without you.” In this case, it’s true. Thanks, Gracie.

## ***SOME UNFINISHED CHAOS***

### **THE SETTING:**

ERIC's apartment, a two-room-plus kitchenette in an "artistic" neighborhood of a major city. Most of the furniture came with the place; it's all cheap and worn -- not inexpensive and well-used but cheap and over-used. The two visible rooms -- all-purpose living room, and bedroom -- are divided by a suggested wall. Off the bedroom is a door, leading to a bathroom, while the kitchenette is suggested by a door or an archway off the living room. The essential furniture includes a sofa; a bed and nightstand; and a desk, on which is situated ERIC's typewriter. In the final scene, a computer table and computer are added.

Costumes are conventional and contemporary to the period.

### **THE TIME:**

The early 1990s.

#### **ACT I: Palisades**

- scene i: A Saturday night in mid-May.
- scene ii: The next evening, about 9:30.
- scene iii: Early the following morning.

#### **ACT II: The Frail Tuck**

- scene i: Sometime during the next several months.
- scene ii: A Saturday in early October, about 4:30 p.m.
- scene iii: The same evening, about 10:00.
- scene iv: The following Monday, late afternoon.

#### **ACT III: Facing The Dark**

- scene i: Three days later. About 4:00 p.m.
- scene ii: An early evening in late November.

**ACT I**  
**PALISADES**

**ACT I, scene i:** A Saturday night in mid-May.

**AT RISE:** The only light is from a lamp on a nightstand in the BEDROOM; visible beside the lamp is a single -- artificial -- giant white chrysanthemum in a small vase. In darkness, the SOUNDS OF A PARTY are heard (on tape) from the LIVING ROOM. Throughout the scene those SOUNDS will rise and fall.

ERIC

*Excuse me.* -- Now be careful, Elaine; the landlord will have a fit if he finds stains on the carpet. Or on any of his truly palatial furnishings. ... Look, everyone help yourselves, I'll be right back. ...

(HE opens the BEDROOM door.)

Hang on, one minute, right?

(HE closes the door and turns on the overhead light.)

Home. Good God.

JESSAMYN

(Entering from the [unseen] bathroom)

Oh. Hi.

ERIC

Oh hello.

JESSAMYN

The, um, the toilet's a little slow?

ERIC

Is it.

JESSAMYN

Yeah.

ERIC

I hadn't noticed. Who are you?

JESSAMYN

Jessamyn Tyler.

ERIC

Ah, yes.

JESSAMYN

I came with Niles?

ERIC

Of course.

We *were* introduced.

JESSAMYN

I'm sure.

ERIC

It's - a nice party.

JESSAMYN

I'm pleased you're enjoying it.

ERIC

It's really not a bad little place.

JESSAMYN

How politic of you to say so. Cigarette?

ERIC

I'm trying to quit.

JESSAMYN

How nice for you.

ERIC

Yes.

JESSAMYN

(ERIC coughs)  
Sounds like you ought to, too.

(SOUND up, then down, in LIVING ROOM.)

I don't like housewarming parties.

ERIC

Oh?

JESSAMYN

Elaine planned it. A surprise.

ERIC

*Which* one's Elaine?

JESSAMYN

The blonde? The beautiful blonde with the slinky black dress and the long legs and the perfectly matched shoes and eye shadow. I'm sure you were introduced.

ERIC

JESSAMYN

I *think* so.

ERIC

Yes. Anyway, she's my ex-... what? At your age I suppose I'd have called her a "girl-friend."  
For want of a more descriptive word, anyway. Nowadays -- what *is* the polite term?

JESSAMYN

Girl-friend.

ERIC

*Plus ça change...*

JESSAMYN

*... plus c'est la même chose...*

ERIC

Yes... Girl-friend.

JESSAMYN

Ex-?

ERIC

Ex.

JESSAMYN

Oh.

ERIC

At one time, oh-*so* long ago, we - dated, fairly frequently.

JESSAMYN

Are you still - involved?

ERIC

"Involved?"

JESSAMYN

Do you still *see* each other?

ERIC

Do I still see her? She's in the next room.

JESSAMYN

No; I mean -- do you still - "see" her?

ERIC

Oh. I see. -- Why do I get the distinct feeling "see" is *not* what you mean when you say "see"?



JESSAMYN

It's a euphemism.

ERIC

A euphemism. Oh, I see. For?

JESSAMYN

*For* - fuck.

ERIC

Well. Well. I don't see where that's any of your business?

JESSAMYN

It's not.

ERIC

On holidays and special occasions. Her birthday. My housewarmings.

JESSAMYN

Tonight's the night, then.

ERIC

So to speak.

JESSAMYN

But you - don't really want to.

ERIC

My, you're not only direct, you're perceptive too.

JESSAMYN

And *you're* not only *indirect*, you're *patronizing* and *transparent*.

ERIC

Touche.

JESSAMYN

Touche. Cheers.

(SHE clinks his glass)

ERIC

You're what my father would have called "cheeky."

JESSAMYN

I suppose I am. Comes from being an only child, probably.

ERIC

Probably.

JESSAMYN

You are going to sleep with her tonight?

ERIC

You're just full of euphemisms, aren't you. ... What is going to happen is this: When this maraud is finally over, Elaine will offer to help me clean up, knowing full well that, left to my own devices, this hovel would remain in its condition until such time as the inspectors came. Then, because the floor will sparkle and the table will shine, *I* will feel guilty and in my drunkenness I will ---

JESSAMYN

Your drunkenness!  
(SHE laughs)

ERIC

At what are you laughing?

JESSAMYN

Are you drunk now?

ERIC

Yes; quite.

JESSAMYN

Like hell you are.

ERIC

You are very irritating.

JESSAMYN

Never mind; go on.

ERIC

Stop interrupting. I will feel guilty, and in my drunkenness I will come up behind her and put my arms around her waist and kiss her neck, ever so gently. And *she* will drop the broom, grab me and haul me off to the bedroom, crotch first, where we will proceed to - fuck, vigorously. And then ... and then, if I'm quite unlucky, I will fall asleep quickly.

JESSAMYN

And if you're lucky?

ERIC

(HE laughs, for the first time)  
If I'm lucky I'll be awake enough to see her home.

JESSAMYN

Sounds like Niles and I.

ERIC

Niles and me.

JESSAMYN

I can't stand to wake up next to him. So we always have sex at his place and then I plead my bad back.

ERIC

What *shall* you do if he offers to put in a board?

JESSAMYN

He already has. I told him I can't stand sex on them.

(ERIC laughs)

I wanted to meet you.

ERIC

You did.

JESSAMYN

That's why I came tonight.

ERIC

Niles talks about me.

JESSAMYN

I asked him about you.

ERIC

What did he say?

JESSAMYN

That you're - irascible. And the only certified genius he's ever met.

ERIC

He has limited experience. Or a poor concept of genius. Or both.

JESSAMYN

And he said he felt privileged to be your agent, and that *Palisades* was the finest piece of literature he'd ever sold.

ERIC

Oh, Christ.

JESSAMYN

What?

ERIC

Look, let's not talk about that, it's been seventeen years and it always leads to a discussion of what I haven't done since. The laurel has rotted.

JESSAMYN

It's a great book. I've read it twice. We used to - debate about it at school ---

ERIC

Thank you now if you'll excuse me I have to be getting back to ---

JESSAMYN

Eric.

ERIC

What.

JESSAMYN

Will you sleep with me?

ERIC

Will... Why?

JESSAMYN

I want --- ... I want to get to know you.

ERIC

There are such things as living rooms. Bars. Restaurants. Coffee houses...

JESSAMYN

I know.

ERIC

... I'm going to freshen my drink now. Excuse me.

JESSAMYN

Gin and tonic. Just a small one.

ERIC

Gin and ---...

JESSAMYN

Just - asking.

ERIC

Mm. Gin and tonic, all right.

JESSAMYN

(ERIC exits, leaving the door open. PARTY SOUNDS up. JESSAMYN sits on the bed and looks around.)

Lord but it's empty in here.

(SHE sees the flower, touches it and looks at it quizzically. ERIC returns with two drinks and closes the door. PARTY SOUNDS down.)

ERIC

Your drink.

JESSAMYN

Thanks.

(Re: The flower)

It's artificial.

ERIC

Yes; real ones are out of season just now. Now: Why?

JESSAMYN

It's very simple.

ERIC

Yes?

JESSAMYN

Uh-huh. *Palisades* fascinated me. I mean, I mean *parts* of it - repelled me, but, but the intensity, the morbidity, the despair... it *all* fascinated me. The thought that a twenty-two year old Englishman who'd spent just three years in this country could write a great ---

ERIC

Good God.

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)

--- book about American life, libertinism and the pursuit of unhappiness fascinated me. And the fact that you haven't written another one in all this time ---

JESSAMYN

--- fascinated me.

(TOGETHER)

ERIC

Fascinated you, I know.

JESSAMYN

Yes, it did. Look, I'm twenty-three. I'm a secretary in a law firm which means my life is not exactly imbued with creative stimuli. I type. Other people's words which, frankly, even when they're interesting aren't interesting. The zombie ward. I love writing; great writing. I studied literature in college. I've been out less than a year. It's a radical change.

ERIC

Indeed. The zombie ward.

JESSAMYN

Uh-huh. And so. I wanted to meet you.

ERIC

(Without sarcasm)

I am not a rock and roll star; I don't accept groupies.

JESSAMYN

Eric: *Your book was fas---*...interesting. And I thought *you* would be. I've never known -- I mean, really *known* -- a great writer. And writers -- I mean, *writing's* -- I want to know more about - how it's - *made*.

ERIC

(The dawn breaks)

You want to write.

JESSAMYN

I --- Yes. Maybe. I mean, I like it a lot; and I've - dabbled. You know -- some poems, a few short stories. I - tried to write a novel once.

ERIC

Ah; you *like* it and you've *dabbled*. Well, let me *tell* you how writing is made; how I make it, at least; *when* I make it, that is. I sit down at my typewriter, and I put in a sheet of paper, and I stare at it. I stare at it until my fingers start to move; and they make words, one, two, a dozen at a time. And when they make enough *good* words, ones I can care about -- which unhappily, doesn't happen often enough -- I thank whatever gods may be, hand Niles whatever *has* happened to come out; and, happily, he sells it. I *don't* dabble. *Writers* don't *dabble*; because, you see, it's important to us. We don't - "like it," it's a *raison d'être*. ... It's mine anyway. And besides, anything else we do is a waste of time. And I ... I waste a lot of time. *And* I write; when I'm - able.

JESSAMYN

I - see.

ERIC

*You - see*. Well; now that you see, and now that you've seen *me*, and learned ---

JESSAMYN

No. Eric: I'd really like to *know* you.

(SHE touches him. HE looks, pointedly, at her hand, but SHE doesn't move it.)

It's just a way in, Eric.

ERIC

What?

JESSAMYN

Sex. It really doesn't matter except I thought it might be easier to start in bed.

ERIC

Start *what?* "Knowing?"

JESSAMYN

And you're attractive.

ERIC

Oh, a nice afterthought, that.

JESSAMYN

You are.

ERIC

Thank you. Let me think it over.

(HE removes her hand.)

JESSAMYN

Can I use your pen?

ERIC

May I. Here.

JESSAMYN

Paper.

(HE hands her a sheet, from a small pocket notebook. SHE writes on it, tears it in half and hands part to him.)

I'll be home tomorrow night. The whole evening.

(HE looks at it, then puts it in his pocket.)

Can I have yours?

(ERIC looks at her)

May I.

(ERIC takes the pen and paper from her, jots the number and returns it.)

JESSAMYN (cont.)

Thank you.

(SHE looks, then tucks the paper away.)

Is Elaine in love with you?

ERIC

Is... Good God. Elaine and I have an agreement; neither of us ever asks that question.

JESSAMYN

Why?

ERIC

*Why?* ... why. Because I don't want to know the answer and she doesn't want to hear it.

JESSAMYN

I'm not in love with Niles.

ERIC

No; I don't suppose you are.

JESSAMYN

He's not in love with me either.

ERIC

I should hope not; he's old enough to be your mother-in-law. Not to mention the patron of three ex-wives.

JESSAMYN

But we admit it.

ERIC

How noble of you both.

JESSAMYN

You're not very kind to her.

ERIC

Look --- I don't remember your name.

JESSAMYN

Jessamyn. Tyler.

ERIC

Look, Jessamyn Tyler: Do not advise me on the conduct of my life.

JESSAMYN

Because she does.



ERIC

(Confused)  
What?

JESSAMYN

Love you. She said so ---

ERIC

Oh; you were introduced.

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)  
--- *and* she talks as though you're *still* together.

ERIC

Elaine is an incurable romantic. And very foolish.

JESSAMYN

And very convenient?

ERIC

I ought to spank you. ... The relationship, Ms. Tyler, is symbiotic. We have both found it "very convenient." And we each find the other still attractive. And, now and again, we - console each other.

JESSAMYN

I'm - sorry.

ERIC

Your apology is accepted. Now, please: Go out there, will you? I'll be out in a minute.  
(HE coughs)

JESSAMYN

You really ought to quit smoking.

ERIC

Hell hath no fury like a smoker reformed. Thank you, your concern has been duly noted.  
Now...?

(HE indicates: Go out)

JESSAMYN

All right.

(SHE starts out, stops)  
Tomorrow night...?

ERIC

I have the number.

(SHE nods and exits to the LIVING ROOM, closing the door behind her. HE takes out the paper, looks at it, shakes his head and starts out. As HE opens the door the PARTY SOUNDS come up.)

Ah, yes. Home.

(HE sighs, coughs; then turns out the overhead and enters the LIVING ROOM as PARTY SOUNDS up full.)

**SCENE**

**ACT I, scene ii:** The next evening, about 9:30.

**AT RISE:** ERIC is at his typewriter, staring at a sheet in the platen. The ashtray beside him is over-filled. HE smokes persistently, now and then coughing as HE drags. There is also a glass and a partially filled manuscript box. On the floor there are numerous crumpled and/or torn pages, carelessly strewn about. Finally, HE taps out a word or two.

ERIC

Come on; come *on!*

(HE sighs, then reads the page)

“She stood in the dim hall, waiting for the bell, watching the moon glide between the darkening clouds. ‘It will rain,’ she ---”

Glide? Good God; the moon only *glides* in Harlequins.

... “watching the moon...” No; no.

(As HE types it)

“Watching the *sky* darken behind the heavy clouds ... behind the heavy, *opaque* clouds...” Um-hm.

(HE types a word or two, looks at the page; then, softly)

Oh, God what crap. What bloody awful crap.

(HE yanks the sheet from the roll, rips it in pieces, throws them to the floor, puts in a new sheet, drinks and stares.)

Now what. *What*. Huh, machine?

(HE slaps it, hard)

What?

(HE finishes the drink, slams the glass down, then begins hurriedly to type. After a moment HE tears the sheet out, crumples it and hurls it to the floor, violently crushes the cigarette out, and sweeps the ashtray off the desk, followed by the glass and the manuscript box. As HE does these:)

Shit! It’s absolute bloody shit! God *damn* it.

(HE breathes heavily, coughs, looks at the mess and shakes his head.

Then, on the brink of tears)

Oh, God damn it.

(HE lights another cigarette and wipes his eyes, goes to the KITCHEN and returns with a filled glass. HE stands a moment looking helplessly at the scattered papers.)

Shit.

(HE slowly starts to gather the papers into an apparent order. As HE does,

ERIC (cont.)  
there is a KNOCK.)

Who is it?

(Another KNOCK.)

Oh for Christ's sake.  
(Opening the door)  
What!

JESSAMYN

Hi. ... The downstairs door was open. Am I interrupting something?

ERIC

It always is, it's broken, and yes, you are. What are you doing here?

JESSAMYN

I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by?

ERIC

Just in the neighborhood. *This* neighborhood; at ten o'clock at night.

JESSAMYN

It's only 9:30. Can I come in?

ERIC

May I and no you may not.

JESSAMYN

Oh, is Elaine here?

ERIC

It isn't your concern either way, but no, as a matter of fact she isn't.

JESSAMYN

Someone else then?

ERIC

Just the typewriter. I was working.

JESSAMYN

At night?

ERIC

Yes, at night. Vampires usually do.

JESSAMYN

Vampires?

ERIC

Writers and vampires: We both feed on the blood of the living. At least, that was one reviewer's comment on *Palisades*.

JESSAMYN

May I come in.

ERIC

Yes, yes. Come in.

JESSAMYN

Thank you. -- Jesus! What a mess. What'd you do, have another party or was ---

ERIC

Yes.

(HE returns to gathering paper)

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)

--- there a mild earthquake I missed on the way over.

ERIC

They only have earthquakes in California. That's how they justify its existence. Sit down. I'll be done in a minute.

JESSAMYN

Where's the vacuum?

ERIC

I don't have one.

JESSAMYN

Ohh-*ka-ay*.

(SHE starts to pick up.)

ERIC

Just -- sit down? I'll take care of it?

(HE begins picking up. JESSAMYN goes to the KITCHEN, returns with broom and dustpan and sweeps while ERIC finishes with the papers.)

JESSAMYN

What's that?

ERIC

What.

JESSAMYN

(Picks up a sheet)  
This.

ERIC

(Takes it)  
George.

JESSAMYN

What?

ERIC

My manuscript. I call it George.

JESSAMYN

Oh. Why?

ERIC

That's its name.

JESSAMYN

Oh. ... Can I see it?

ERIC

*May* I and no.  
(HE finishes)  
Now -- what *are* you doing here.

JESSAMYN

You'll never get this all up without a vacuum.

ERIC

The landlord will be devastated; *what?*

JESSAMYN

... Can --- May I have a drink first?

ERIC

... I'm out of gin.

JESSAMYN

Then whatever you're drinking; unless it's scotch.

ERIC

(With knowing humor)  
All right.

(HE goes to the KITCHEN.)

JESSAMYN

(Peeking at the open manuscript box)  
You, um, you still use a typewriter.

ERIC

I'm an old dog. I use an answering machine, too.

JESSAMYN

Mm.

ERIC

(HE returns with her drink, covers the  
box and puts it away.)

Here.

JESSAMYN

Thanks. Cheers.  
(SHE drinks)  
What *is* this?

ERIC

Iced tea.

JESSAMYN

Iced tea?!

ERIC

You said whatever I was drinking. That's what I drink when I'm working. Hot, in the winter.

JESSAMYN

*Am* I interrupting? Really?

ERIC

Nothing - important. It hasn't been a very productive evening.

JESSAMYN

I'm sorry.

ERIC

Yes, well. So am I.

JESSAMYN

I called. About an hour ago. I got the answering machine.

ERIC

The phone in there's  
(The BEDROOM)

ERIC (cont.)

turned down; this one doesn't have a ringer. I hate - sudden noises, while I'm there.  
(At the typewriter)

JESSAMYN

Oh.

ERIC

Yes. Oh.

JESSAMYN

What *did* happen tonight?

ERIC

I was having a difficult evening, and... Jessamyn, why did you come?

JESSAMYN

So this is what a real working-writer's studio looks like.

ERIC

You're *changing* the subject.

JESSAMYN

Yep.

ERIC

I see. All right then: No; this is what a sometimes-working writer's studio looks like. *Real* working writers' studios overlook acres of land in Maine or Scotland or some such place, where they churn out books by the pound, like butter, in pastoral creative bliss.

JESSAMYN

And sometimes-working writers' studios overlook urban squalor.

ERIC

And they *manufacture*; pages; one or two a day; if they're lucky. Except when they're off lecturing to make a living.

JESSAMYN

Is - George a new book?

ERIC

Perhaps. Eventually.

JESSAMYN

You have a lot done?



ERIC

A lot. I don't know. Twenty thousand words. A third of the way.

JESSAMYN

Can I at least ask what it's about?

ERIC

Look; I think I'm displaying an admirable patience, particularly in view of the fact that I'm not in a very pleasant humor. If you've come here to "get to know me," as I think? you put it last night, *this* is not the time, ---

JESSAMYN

No, I ---

ERIC

(Without pause)

--- I'm not in the mood for a friendly chat about my life, my writing, or the other, less important problems of the world. So, if you will please tell me why you're here, we can get on it with it and I can have a glass of scotch and go to bed which is what I would really like to do.

JESSAMYN

I'm sorry; I'm nervous... Here. I - thought you weren't home. I was going to slip it under your door.

(SHE takes a large manila envelope from her bag and offers it.)

ERIC

What's this.

JESSAMYN

A story.

ERIC

Yours?

JESSAMYN

Yeah.

ERIC

You want me to read it.

JESSAMYN

Yeah.

ERIC

And?

JESSAMYN

Tell me - what you think.

ERIC

Tell you what I think. I'm not a teacher, Jessamyn.

JESSAMYN

I know.

ERIC

I'm also not a critic.

JESSAMYN

I know.

ERIC

And what I *think* doesn't mean very much. Niles' opinion has a good deal more significance, you know.

JESSAMYN

Not to me.

ERIC

How very sheltered of you, to think so. But you'll learn. ... Jessamyn --- No. I have - that  
(His manuscript)  
to deal with; I don't think so.

JESSAMYN

Eric --- it's important to me. I would appreciate it.

ERIC

I'm sure. And your gratitude would be boundless.

JESSAMYN

... No.

ERIC

No. No. ... If I think it's a bad story I'll tell you; and in no uncertain terms.

JESSAMYN

I want you to. But I think you'll like it.

ERIC

Oh, no -- whether I like it has nothing to do with whether I think it's a *good* story.

JESSAMYN

Then I want you to tell me if you think it's good.

ERIC

Why *me*?

JESSAMYN

Because - I want your help.

ERIC

My help with what? *Niles* is the agent, I don't even know ---

JESSAMYN

No. With my writing. I told you, I want to learn more about how writing is *made*. Eric: I'm good. I want to get better; I want to be able to write a novel someday, a really great novel, maybe as great as *Palisades*; but I don't know how yet, and, and - the whole idea of a novel scares me because, because it feels like - trying to climb Mt. Everest when all I've ever done is wade in the sand. You could help me.

ERIC

You want my help? Writing? Oh, that's very funny.

JESSAMYN

Why is it funny.

ERIC

Because for the past seventeen years I haven't been able to help *myself* write. I've been living on a reputation, not an oeuvre; I've published a handful of short stories and a trash-can full of witticisms instead of literature. That --

(The manuscript)

that "third of the way" has taken me nearly *four years*. At which pace I should finish it just in time for posthumous publication. ... And the worst part is I don't know if it'll be any good, *if* I finish; or if it will end up like the others.

JESSAMYN

Others?

ERIC

Its predecessors. *Palisades*' successors. Both of them.

JESSAMYN

You wrote two other books? Why ---

ERIC

Wrote, and burned. They - weren't very good. ... And *you* want *my* help. Nobody's asked me to do that; not for a long time. A long time.

JESSAMYN

I am. I want it.

ERIC

And what, Doctor Faust, do *I* receive?

JESSAMYN

You want my soul?

ERIC

No, no, that's no good to me. I have enough trouble dealing with my own.

JESSAMYN

Then, I - don't know.

ERIC

Mm. -- Excuse me. I'm going to have that glass of scotch. There's a little vodka, some brandy; probably some beer.

JESSAMYN

Brandy. Neat.

ERIC

(With humor)  
Brandy, neat.

(HE goes to the KITCHEN.)

JESSAMYN

This place is depressing. Doesn't have much life.

ERIC

It's a place to work; the decor doesn't concern me.

JESSAMYN

At least it's really clean.

ERIC

Yes; I was very conscientious.

JESSAMYN

*You* were?

ERIC

New home, new habits. ... Elaine - didn't stay. I sent her home.

JESSAMYN

Oh.

ERIC

We had - rather a row about it, I'm afraid.

(Re-enters with the drinks)

I don't imagine she'll be terribly anxious to - "see" me; for a while, at least.

JESSAMYN

I'm sorry.

ERIC

*C'est le coeur, c'est la vie...*

JESSAMYN

I *am* sorry, Eric.

ERIC

Yes, well. ... About this - "help" you want: Why didn't you say anything last night.

JESSAMYN

You were --- I wasn't sure how you'd react.

ERIC

And tonight you were.

JESSAMYN

No. But I didn't want to let it just drop. I was afraid if I waited, it would; I mean, you wouldn't call and I'd lose *my* nerve. I really want this, Eric: I want to write. You could help me. And, maybe I could help you.

ERIC

How generous of you to offer. And just how do you propose to go about "helping me."

JESSAMYN

I don't know.

ERIC

No. Of course not.

(HE coughs)

JESSAMYN

Are you okay?

ERIC

Just too many of these.

(Cigarettes)

And I didn't sleep particularly well last night.

JESSAMYN

I was up late, too.

ERIC

Were you?

JESSAMYN

We went for a drink. Niles and me; after we left. He said he wanted to talk to me.

(Laughs)

It's funny; in college it seemed like everything happened while I was dancing; it was the common social denominator; any time I wanted to talk to somebody, a guy, even a girlfriend, we danced. It made me feel so - relaxed. So free. ... I hardly drank at all. Now it's like everything happens over a drink. All this really does is

(With mild humor)

give me Dutch courage like - last night...

ERIC

One of the privileges of adulthood.

JESSAMYN

I guess so. I - guess so. Anyway ... what he wanted to talk about last night was, he's "involved" with another woman. Who he plans to see exclusively. ... I mean, we're still friends, just ... not...

ERIC

Oh.

JESSAMYN

At least he was upfront about it.

ERIC

At least.

JESSAMYN

You might at least say you're sorry.

ERIC

I might. Are you?

JESSAMYN

Yes; and no. Mostly - I don't know.

ERIC

Then I'm sorry.

JESSAMYN

(Pause)

Will you dance with me?

ERIC

Here? Now?

JESSAMYN

Yeah.

ERIC

Jessamyn, I'm very tired.

JESSAMYN

One dance. Then I'll go.

ERIC

One dance.

(HE turns on a radio to soft MUSIC, then moves her into slow-dance position.)

This is against my better judgment.

JESSAMYN

(THEY dance.)

You're very good.

ERIC

That surprises you.

JESSAMYN

Yeah; I guess it does.

ERIC

It was a requisite social grace where I grew up. Boys and girls both took dance lessons until they could waltz, fox trot and tango with aplomb.

JESSAMYN

Where was that?

ERIC

A small town -- almost a village, actually -- in Norfolk. On the seacoast. The principal industry -- and smell -- is fish.

JESSAMYN

Was it pretty?

ERIC

Like a postcard: Peaceful and prosaic. Some people spent all-but their whole lives there; they were born, they fished, they married; they gave birth, they died. Once a year they went to Yarmouth, or Cambridge, or even to London; the most adventurous ones went to Paris or Brussels. And they were happy.

JESSAMYN

You weren't.

ERIC

Oh, I don't know. I *was* - restless. By the time I was eighteen both my parents were dead, my sister was long since married with a horde already at her heels and a husband who drank. ... I knew I wanted to write; and it seemed the only way to go about doing it was *to* do it -- do things I could write *about*. America seemed distant and exciting and - all the things Bacton was not. So I came here.

JESSAMYN

Have you been back?

ERIC

Once. For a promotional tour. When *Palisades* was published there. ... My sister hated it. Even now her annual letter doesn't fail to mention how she's sure I'll "write a better book next time."  
(Short pause. THEY dance.)

What about you? You grew up here?

JESSAMYN

No; Nebraska.

ERIC

Nebraska? I think I flew over that once.

JESSAMYN

I liked it!

ERIC

(With humor)

Did you?

JESSAMYN

Um-hm. Omaha seems small now, but it didn't then; of course. But there were houses, every street had lawns and gardens and swing sets in the yards. Lots of stars at night. And it was a very - horizontal place, you know what I mean?, I mean, this is vertical, everything goes up, higher and higher, there are no roofs for as far as the eye can see, only spires and steeples, silhouettes and rising smoke. And the stars are almost invisible -- too many lights. ... Anyway ... they got divorced when I was twelve -- my parents -- and we moved here -- my mom and me. It felt so - different, for a long time; all the people, all the noise.

(With humor)

All the *apartments*. ... Now it feels like home, though. I went back to Omaha last summer -- just to, you know, see what it was like now; it didn't feel at all like the same place.

ERIC

Things change.



JESSAMYN

I guess they do;

(With almost wistful humor)

but they're not supposed to... It's the only other place I ever lived; I expected it to be like I remembered it.

ERIC

“Memory is that frail tuck/ Into which we sew our examinations of the moment;/ But its fabric, unlike all others/ May only *fade* with time.”

JESSAMYN

Yes.

(ERIC coughs, badly.)

Eric?

(With concern)

Hey, are you okay?

ERIC

Yes, yes, fine. Just tired.

JESSAMYN

We can stop now.

ERIC

I-'m, rather enjoying it.

JESSAMYN

(Animatedly)

Yeah?

ERIC

Yeah.

JESSAMYN

Me too.

ERIC

Well, then?

(THEY dance.)

JESSAMYN

What you said before, about memory? Did you write that?

ERIC

No. Anne Aiello Denniston. A poet.

JESSAMYN

I like it. "That frail tuck...". I remember some things I wish just *would* fade.

ERIC

(Not with humor)  
We all do, I'm afraid.

(Short pause. THEY dance.)

Does your mother still live here?

JESSAMYN

She, um, she died; two years ago.

ERIC

I see. ... I'm sorry.

JESSAMYN

The, the - *hard* thing was that it was like, like it was so - *unfair*; I mean, she was just getting started again, I was living on my own, she'd gotten this really good job, and she was even thinking about getting married again ... and then she died.

(Bitterly, at first)

I mean, it was just so - damn *stupid!*, she was doing so great and then, and then she has this heart attack and... All of a sudden. ... It just seemed so - unfinished.

ERIC

Like everyone's.

JESSAMYN

What?

ERIC

Lives. They're all unfinished. Death - ties everything together.

JESSAMYN

I guess so. I - guess so.

ERIC

... Your father...?

JESSAMYN

He lives in Arizona now; he likes the heat. We - don't talk much. I guess we, I mean, even when I was a kid we... Just, ...

ERIC

All right.

JESSAMYN

We write. Letters and stuff.

(ERIC nods. In silence, THEY dance.  
The MUSIC ends. A DISC  
VOICE is heard faintly  
ERIC turns the radio off.)

JOCKEY'S  
underneath until

ERIC

Well.

JESSAMYN

Thank you.

ERIC

You're welcome. You dance well, too.

JESSAMYN

I studied for years,  
(Curtseys)  
to make me "graceful." I was a real klutzy kid.

ERIC

I see.

JESSAMYN

(Long beat)  
Should I, um, go? Now?

ERIC

You can finish your drink first.

JESSAMYN

Thank you. Can I, I mean, can I ask you a question? About *Palisades*?

ERIC

You can *ask*.

JESSAMYN

Parts of it, some, were so - gruesome.

ERIC

So are some parts of life.

JESSAMYN

Not like *that*.

ERIC

No?

JESSAMYN

Like, I mean, you know the part where the girl is sitting on the bed after she's taken the pill, her last one? and she's holding the pot and the spoon and ---

ERIC

(Almost viciously)

*I remember it.*

(Short beat)

I mean, -- I wrote it; you'll recall.

JESSAMYN

Um - ... Yes. Eric?

ERIC

(Not all there)

Umm?

JESSAMYN

The girl... -- I always wondered: was she, um, anybody. Based I mean; on anyone; in particular, I mean.

ERIC

In part. In large part. On my wife.

JESSAMYN

Your --- I didn't know you were married.

ERIC

Neither did she. Or at least it didn't seem to matter to her when it came to --- ... At all events, we were both nineteen; and it didn't last long; a year. A year and a half.

JESSAMYN

I'm sorry.

ERIC

So was I; when it happened. I'm not now. *Palisades* was its - after-effect; if it hadn't been for Caroline I'd never have written it. That was her one *good* consequence.

JESSAMYN

Did you, I mean, do you ever hear from her. See her? After?

ERIC

... She's dead.

JESSAMYN

Oh... I - ...

ERIC

She took too many pills one night. The *coroner* said it was accidental. It's almost seventeen years now. July 8th.

JESSAMYN

You still think about her.

ERIC

(Suddenly and extremely angry)  
Don't you still think about your dead?

JESSAMYN

But I --- I didn't mean ...

ERIC

(Still angry; but with restraint)  
No; no, *I'm* sorry. I'm sorry... Yes. I still think about her. I ---  
(HE drinks and coughs)  
I think you'd better go.

JESSAMYN

All right.

ERIC

All right.

JESSAMYN

Will you call me?

ERIC

I - don't know. Let's just ---

JESSAMYN

No; I mean after you read it. My story.

ERIC

Oh. Yes... Yes, I'll call you.

JESSAMYN

Thank you. Well, then. Good night.

ERIC

You'll be all right?

JESSAMYN

My car's right in front. And I've got a doorman.

ERIC

All right then. Good night.

(HE walks her to the door and opens it. SHE puts a hand on his arm, then reaches to kiss him. HE allows it, but doesn't respond.)

Good night.

JESSAMYN

Good night, Eric.

(SHE leaves. ERIC stands by the door a moment, then moves to the sofa, picks up the envelope, looks at it; then he

shakes his

head and lays it aside. HE leans back, eyes closed, a long moment.)

ERIC

Oh, God. God God God God God...

**SLOW CURTAIN**

**ACT I, scene iii:** Early the following morning.

**BEFORE RISE,** JESSAMYN'S TELEPHONE RINGS OVER SPEAKERS. **AT RISE:** ERIC is seated on his bed, his phone in hand. The RINGING continues. JESSAMYN'S 'phone is answered by JESSAMYN'S VOICE after the second ring.

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

(Just wakened, but not awake)

H'lo.

ERIC

Jessamyn?

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

Uh-huh.

ERIC

Good morning.

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

What?

ERIC

I said: Good mor--- Did I wake you?

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

Who's this?

ERIC

Evidently I did. It's Eric.

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

Oh. Eric. Hi.

ERIC

Are you at least moderately alert?

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

It's ... what time is it?

ERIC

Five-thirty.

JESSAMYN'S VOICE

In the morning?

ERIC

Yes. I thought you'd be getting ready for work.

Not yet. JESSAMYN'S VOICE

Ah. Shall I call you back then? ERIC

'Kay. JESSAMYN'S VOICE

I read your story. ERIC

Uh-huh. JESSAMYN'S VOICE

You're right; it's good. Very good. And, I liked it. ERIC

Oh. JESSAMYN'S VOICE  
(Yawns)  
Good.

We should talk about it. ERIC

Uh-huh. JESSAMYN'S VOICE

(With humor) ERIC  
Call me when you wake up.

All right. JESSAMYN'S VOICE

(With humor) ERIC  
Good night, Jessamyn. Sweet ---

Oh my God, he read my --- *Wait!* I'm awake. Tell me. JESSAMYN'S VOICE  
(MUSIC up quickly.)

**END OF ACT I**



**ACT II**  
**THE FRAIL TUCK**

**ACT II, scene i:** Sometime during the next few months.

**BEFORE RISE**, ERIC's voice is heard. **AT RISE:** ERIC and JESSAMYN are discovered in the LIVING ROOM. SHE holds a manuscript.

ERIC

... And if you wait until the penultimate paragraph to tell them *why* she wants to stay...

JESSAMYN

(Overlapping)

Even if they *think* they know the answer they won't know for sure till then...

ERIC

(Overlapping)

And not only will the suspense be maintained, but you can cut most of these pages ---

JESSAMYN

Uh-huh. Yeah. Um-hm.

ERIC

(Without pause)

--- which will improve its ---

JESSAMYN

(Overlapping)

Um-hm.

ERIC

(Without pause)

--- marketability. You see?

JESSAMYN

Yes. Yes! Thank you. I think.

ERIC

Why "think?"

JESSAMYN

Because *now* I get to do more rewrites. God; I've been working on this since last summer. I thought I was done with this sucker.

ERIC

(Laughs)

Nothing's ever done. Ever.

JESSAMYN

D' you think anyone'll ever buy it?

ERIC

I shouldn't be surprised. I think you ought to show it to Niles, anyway.

JESSAMYN

To Niles? Why?

ERIC

He's an agent, Jessamyn. He sells things.

JESSAMYN

Books. Not stories.

ERIC

Stories too; sometimes. And in this case... It's worth a try, at all events.

JESSAMYN

Well...

(MUSIC up.)

**SCENE**

**ACT II, scene ii:** A Saturday in early October, about 4:30 p.m.

**AT RISE:** ERIC, fully dressed, is on the bed asleep. JESSAMYN is heard pounding at the door.

JESSAMYN

Eric! Eric! Come on, open up!  
(Etc. SHE continues until  
HE opens the door)

ERIC

(Waking slowly; HE coughs)  
What... Oh, damn; she's ---  
(HE gets up groggily and  
starts toward the LIVING ROOM)  
Stop that! Someone will call the police.

JESSAMYN

Then let me in!

ERIC

(HE hesitates to look toward the  
KITCHEN, then goes to the door)  
All right, I'm coming, I'm *coming*. You *are* early; you weren't due here ---

JESSAMYN

(Overlapping)  
Well, hurry up!

ERIC

Yes, Ma'am!

(HE opens the door.)

Jessamyn, it's only four ---

(JESSAMYN throws her arms around  
him [if the actor and actress can

handle

it, SHE should jump into his arms] and  
kisses him. It's a brief but active kiss

on

her part, though ERIC is caught  
completely off guard. SHE breaks the  
kiss, jumps down, kicks the door closed  
and marches into the apartment; and  
screams, loud and long. ERIC looks on  
with amusement.)

Well.

JESSAMYN

(SHE screams again, now coherently)

*He sold it! He sold it!* I'm going to be published! My story's going to be ---

ERIC

(Still amused)

I know.

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)

--- published and it's all your fault, if you hadn't ---

(Short beat)

You *know*?!

ERIC

Niles called me. Congratulations.

JESSAMYN

He called *you*? About *my* story?

ERIC

He said he called you first; and left a message. -- He thought you might be here.

JESSAMYN

Oh, damn it!

ERIC

What?

JESSAMYN

I wanted to surprise you.

ERIC

How? By telling me it was sold?

JESSAMYN

Yes!

ERIC

That *wasn't* a surprise.

JESSAMYN

It wasn't?

ERIC

No. It's a good story. All Niles did was place it in a better market than you could have reached on your own.

JESSAMYN

That's all, huh?

ERIC

That's all. You wrote it.

JESSAMYN

With your help.

ERIC

No; you *wrote* it without my help. I helped you *rewrite* it.

JESSAMYN

Eric, I...

ERIC

Yes?

JESSAMYN

I - ... Never mind. ... Hey! Let's go somewhere. Dinner, with champagne and everything. I'm starving. And -- I want to *ce-le-brate!*

ERIC

(Yawns)

Excuse me.

JESSAMYN

Really roasts your weenie, huh.

ERIC

I was sleeping. You woke me up.

JESSAMYN

Not as much as a pound of caviar and a magnum of Perignon will! C'mon, let's ---

ERIC

Jessamyn; it's twenty after four, I'm really not the least hungry; and you were due here at five to go over that.

(A manuscript)

JESSAMYN

Eric, I'm sky-high! I just sold my first story!

ERIC

Which you wrote over a year ago. What have you done for you lately?

JESSAMYN

Oh, Jesus!

ERIC

Writers write; anything else they do

ERIC  
is a waste of time.

(TOGETHER)

JESSAMYN  
Is a waste of time, I know,  
I know.

ERIC

Well, if you know...

JESSAMYN

Ooh! All *right!* All right; all right! ... Let's do it. What's wrong with this?

ERIC

In a moment. Excuse me.

(HE goes into the KITCHEN.)

And I do wish you'd called before you came over. George and I might have been having a go.

JESSAMYN

How is he - coming?

ERIC

Not as quickly as I'd *like*...

JESSAMYN

But?

ERIC

But - modestly well. *I* think; I finished seven hundred words today. That's more than twelve thousand in the last three months. I've actually begun to believe he'll get finished.

JESSAMYN

That's terrific.

ERIC

Yes. Another five thousand and I'll let Niles have a go at selling it.

JESSAMYN

Can I see it then?

ERIC

We'll see.

(As HE returns with a dozen roses -- not

red; and still fully closed -- wrapped in newspaper.)

The last time I worked that quickly was *Palisades*. And you should have called.

JESSAMYN

(Concentrating elsewhere)

I told you, I wanted to surprise you.

ERIC

But *I* wanted the chance to get these into something a little more - appropriate. Life, however, being a series of unexpected events, big and small...

JESSAMYN

(Long beat)

Those're for me?

ERIC

Um-hmm.

JESSAMYN

Really?

ERIC

I hate roses.

JESSAMYN

Oh, Eric. Thank you.

ERIC

You're welcome. And congratulations.

(HE lights a cigarette.)

JESSAMYN

Oh, God, they're so beautiful. Nobody's given me roses since... I don't remember... High school, maybe. And those were from my mother... Thank you.

ERIC

You said that.

JESSAMYN

I - I'm...

(SHE tears)

Oh, Eric.

ERIC

(With gentle humor)

You said that, too.



Oh, darn. JESSAMYN

What? ERIC

I'm out of Kleenex! JESSAMYN

An unexpected small event. Here. ERIC

Thank you. ... These are so nice. JESSAMYN

I'm glad you like them. ERIC

I love them; roses are my favorite. JESSAMYN

Mm. ERIC

Is there, I mean, do you have a vase or something? To put them in? JESSAMYN

Nothing suitable. I had planned to go to the market for one, but I dozed off. ERIC  
(HE returns to the KITCHEN. )

Let me see what I can conjure.

Anything's okay. JESSAMYN

"Anything's" what you're likely to get. ERIC

Yay, me. JESSAMYN  
(OFF, ERIC laughs)

Oh, God.

What? ERIC

JESSAMYN

I was just thinking. About my father.

ERIC

Uh-huh.

JESSAMYN

I called; to tell him?

(Small laugh)

I guess I should've waited till tomorrow; after this wore off a little. He congratulated me and all that, but he was so "matter-of-fact" about everything... I guess I felt like it didn't mean much to him. Not *that* much. It probably didn't.

(Small laugh)

He probably thought I'd never make any money at it.

(OFF, ERIC laughs)

Mom always encouraged it. She loved to read. She was the one who gave me *Palisades*. *She* thought it was a --- she liked it a lot, too...

ERIC

Good.

JESSAMYN

God, I love these, they're so - delicate. Y' know what they always make me think of? Hope.

ERIC

Roses? I don't see the connection.

JESSAMYN

Oh, it's ... when I was, I don't know, eleven or twelve I guess, my mother took me to see my first play.

(As a comment)

***Henry the Eighth.***

(Laughs)

I don't think I understood a word of it, but, but there was this one line I remembered: "This is the state of man: today he puts forth/ The tender leaves of hope; tomorrow blossoms..." And *that* reminded me of roses, so... I mean, I *know* they're *supposed* to mean "I love you," y' know?, if they're in full bloom anyway -- but whenever I see them, 'specially like this, they just look like "tender leaves of hope." Anyway, that's what I think of.

ERIC

I see.

JESSAMYN

But I guess they *could* mean "I love you;" huh?

(ERIC appears, his hands behind his back; then HE holds out a half-gallon beverage

carton.)

ERIC

Only if they're red, I think this is it.

JESSAMYN

Perfect!

ERIC

Hardly. But I'm afraid it will have to do.

JESSAMYN

(Puts the roses into it)

Now can we celebrate?

ERIC

You're bound and determined, aren't you.

JESSAMYN

Uh-huh!

ERIC

Where do you want to go?

JESSAMYN

I don't know. Are you really not hungry?

ERIC

Not much.

JESSAMYN

Well, *get* hungry. Let's go someplace nice, with music and champagne and penguins -- wait! I mean, I mean *waiters*, who wear penguin suits and hover.

ERIC

I see. Well, let me change into something a little more suitable then.

(HE goes to the BEDROOM.  
JESSAMYN follows.)

JESSAMYN

Okay.

ERIC

*In, private.*

JESSAMYN

Oh all right.

ERIC

Thank you.

JESSAMYN

(During the following ERIC changes into a suit and tie.)

Didn't you celebrate your first sale?

ERIC

Not really.

JESSAMYN

You didn't?!

ERIC

My first sale was *Palisades*. I think it was too much of a shock to celebrate... I stayed home. At all events, I was poor as a churchmouse, at least until the advance came through.

JESSAMYN

Oh.

ERIC

It was three months after the divorce. ... I called Caroline, she thought I'd sold Herbert, she came ---

JESSAMYN

Who?

ERIC

Her--- something else. She came over, we made dinner. We drank a bottle of cheap wine. I...

JESSAMYN

... Eric? Will you, will you tell me about her?

ERIC

Caroline - wrote. Or tried to... We met in a writers' group; all young, would-be writers. I - ... She was very - frightened of my writing.

(To himself)

And other things. Many other things.

JESSAMYN

What? I didn't hear you.

ERIC

Nothing. I don't think I care to talk about her.

(JESSAMYN knocks on the door.)

Yes?

JESSAMYN

Can I come in now?

ERIC

Yes. Yes.

JESSAMYN

I don't want to upset you, Eric. I just want to - help. If you'll let me.

ERIC

Look, maybe - another time. But not now.

JESSAMYN

All right.

(Short beat)

Will you kiss me?

ERIC

I - don't think so.

JESSAMYN

Why not.

ERIC

It - isn't a good idea. Now.

JESSAMYN

I think you should.

ERIC

You do.

JESSAMYN

Yep.

ERIC

Why?

JESSAMYN

Because we've been seeing each other for almost five months and you ---

ERIC

Wait, wait, wait, wait.

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)

--- haven't and this is a special occasion and I want you to damn it what?

ERIC

I have been *working* with you.

JESSAMYN

We go out.

ERIC

For coffee; to talk.

JESSAMYN

Then, because it's a special occasion ---

ERIC

Jessamyn, I really ---

JESSAMYN

(Without pause)

--- *And because* - I want you to, Eric.

ERIC

Jessamyn, I ...

(HE goes to her and, very gently and briefly, pecks her without embracing.)

We should go now.

(SHE nods)

Come on, then.

JESSAMYN

This is the first time I've seen you in a suit since your party. You lost some weight.

ERIC

A pound or three.

JESSAMYN

Or ten. This's (His jacket) loose.

ERIC

Umm.

JESSAMYN

But I think you look very handsome.

ERIC

*Thank* you. Come on, let's go.

(HE picks up a raincoat and hat.)

JESSAMYN

*I'm ready.*

ERIC

We haven't decided where we're going.

JESSAMYN

It's nice out; let's just walk and see where we end up. Maybe it'll burn up some of my energy. And give you an appetite.

ERIC

All right.

JESSAMYN

Will you work on the new story with me later?

ERIC

If you like.

JESSAMYN

'Kay, then. Let's go.

(THEY exit.)

(At the top of her voice)  
YAY, ME!

**SCENE**

