

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

**a monologue
by Tom Baum**

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(Lights up on EDWIN, a man in his 70s, as he glides into view in a wheelchair. He's wearing a flowered dress, lipstick, a flowing wig, a delicate scarf, athletic socks, and no shoes. He peers up at an unseen blackboard.)

EDWIN: *(male voice)* All right, let's have a look, what poison are they serving us today? Cream of mushroom?! Lasagna?! Cheesecake?!? What's the matter, we're not dying off fast enough to please these idiots? Kill us with calories, is that their latest plan?

Well...death is always an option. I don't know if you heard, my daughter, she's coming here today. Supposed to sign papers, move me to the Assisted Wing. A person of my stature does not belong with the Gorks.

OK, I see you're all looking at my feet. I could take off these Wigwams, but it's pretty Chinese-looking under my socks. Two steps and I'm screaming with pain, which is why you always see me in this wheelchair.

How did they get this way? Sad to say, my Jimmy Choos. And don't worry, I know what you're all thinking. "How long has Edwina been wearing women's clothes?"

Not until my wife left me. For another woman. (Hands, gentlemen, if that happened to you. Yup, see? It's a goddamn epidemic.) The girl showed up with a U-Haul...goodbye and good luck. Didn't bother packing half her things.

That was the only upside. That gave me a starter wardrobe.

See, I'd never lived without a woman. Not ever. I needed one around, even if it was only a mirror image.

You look in the mirror long enough, it starts talking back to you. *(deep male voice)* "Look at you, you're beautiful." *(female voice)* "Well, thank you." *(male)* "So isn't it time you shared your beauty with the world?" *(female)* "Yeah, but I'm scared. What should I wear?" *(male)* "The little black dress, with the puffy sleeves. And don't forget the Jimmy Choos."

So I put on that little black number and I take the elevator downstairs.

Right away, uh-oh, there's Cesar, the doorman. Chat up that meter maid, Cesar, that's the ticket. Oh boy, who's this coming toward me? Christ, he's stopping, this geezer, he's got fifteen years on me at least, and a couple of nasty little chihuahuas in tow. *(English accent)* "Care to get a cup of coffee?"

Any dog-haters among you? I'm not ashamed to admit it. Hate their smell, hate everything about them. Plus now, with the little black dress—the increased access to my private area. *(female)* "Thank you, sir, I'm spoken for."

So off he goes with his little rat dogs, and I go for a walk through the park. Come back to the building, I walk straight up to Cesar. (*female*) "I'm Edwina. I'm here to see the man in 703." (*Latino*) "You must be Dr. Edwin's sister." (*female*) "No, we're just friends." (*Latino*) "OK, you wait, I call 703." And of course there's no one there. So I sneak around the service entrance, and next day, I'm leaving for the hospital, I tell Cesar, (*female*) "My friend Edwina's coming to visit, please let her up." (*Latino*) "You got it, Dr. Edwin."

And that's how it goes for a while. I'm still making a living as Dr. Edwin, and Edwina's going on her daily walks. But the years are taking their toll. One day...I couldn't find my way home from the park. (Yeah, like that hasn't happened to you.) And I'm starting to be afraid of the mirror, like there's somebody living in it that I don't want to see. Plus the incontinence...raise your hand if you've been spared. Yeah, you're lying.

But it wasn't dementia! This was NPH—water on the brain. So I had the cranial fluid drained with a shunt, and right away things got better. No more narcolepsy, I can hold my water, I stop putting my Jimmy Choos in the freezer. But I needed some place to recuperate. So I move in with my daughter--the very person who wants to put me with the Gorks. Waiting for me to die, kissing my ass, afraid I'd disown her if she didn't.

Most days I had the house to myself. I'd gussy up and walk the neighborhood, just like my happy days in the city. I stayed out of my daughter's way, she stayed out of mine, for a while everything was copacetic.

Except for the dogs. This pair of Dobermans, they were the worst. Property of the Neighborhood Asshole. I'm on the other side of the street, minding my own business...and God help me, here comes one of these Nazi motherfuckers. I'm hobbling away, he races across the street, ow, fuck, bites me on the leg...right here...sinks his teeth into my gastrocnemius. I whack him with my parasol...he starts whimpering, hangs his head, and goes howling back to his master.

So I won that one. But the bite gets infected. That, plus the pain in my feet...I'm waking up every morning in a murderous rage.

So what I did... I gave both those Dobermans a Texas hot dog. (Oh what, you're gonna hold that against me? I was doing the neighborhood a favor.) I bought myself a package of Oscar Meyers, stuff a few strychnine pellets inside, and I go limping up the street to the Neighborhood Asshole's house. "Here, doggie. Got something for you...Gobble it up, that's a good doggie...*Auf wiedersehen*, motherfuckers."

And then, oh shit...the door to the house flies open, and here comes the Neighborhood Asshole. He's grabbing my handbag, tears it off my shoulder, and Christ, there's my wallet, with a hospital card that includes my next-of-kin. My daughter comes home that night, doorbell rings, and the Neighborhood Asshole is telling the whole story. I had to get out of there fast, no questions asked.

Well, by the time I get back to my apartment I'm in a really bad way. (*Latino*) "Oh, hello Edwina. Dr. Edwin must be on vacation, I haven't seen him for weeks. You want me to try him?" (*female*) "Don't bother, I'll go see for myself."

And turns out Cesar was wrong. Dr. Edwin wasn't on vacation. He'd been there the whole time I was away. He steps out of the mirror, and he's angry as hell. (*deep male voice*) "Just who do you think you are? Leaving me here all alone."

He looked good, though. Picture of health. No water on the brain, no misshapen feet, all that had happened to Edwina, not him.

But Dr. Edwin couldn't heal me. My feet were too far gone. But he did take charge of my life. First thing he did, Edwin sold the apartment. Then he kept us moving...one city after another, one step ahead of my daughter. He does the shopping, he writes the checks, he cheered me up when I felt depressed. Until one day...we hear a knock on the door.

Edwin, he was smart enough to sneak out the back. I answer the knock, and it's my daughter's P.I. She's been looking for me, with a court order, and now they found me.

So then came the hearing, maybe some of you read about it, that travesty. All my money goes to my daughter, and now she can send me to the Assisted Wing. Don't let her do it, please? Help me, people, they won't let me wear my wardrobe there.

(He breaks off, staring. Can't quite believe his eyes. Brightens.)

Oh thank God.

Edwin, can you believe it, they want to send me to the Assisted Wing. You gotta get me out of here, before my daughter signs the papers. What are you saying, I can't hear you. Edwin, I can't hear what you're saying. Don't look at me like that, I don't belong down there, Edwin, where are you going, don't go, Edwin, please come back. Don't leave me here all by myself!

(Hears himself, looks around at the faces staring at him.)

On second thought, I will have the cheesecake.

(Blackout. END OF PLAY.)