

About What Matters

a short, pointed play

by Jennie Webb

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About What Matters

- Synopsis: A short, pointed play about, among other things, priorities, boundaries, certainties and letting life get to you.
- Characters: The dogged woman, who enthusiastically pursues and doesn't give up easily; and
The curled-up woman, who often manages to convince herself she doesn't want what doesn't come to her.
- Setting: A waiting area—maybe it's in a hospital, or government building, or just another office
- Time: Probably after lunch.

About What Matters

We see two women sitting together on chairs or a bench, in a waiting area—maybe it's in a hospital, or government building, or just another office. Maybe there are reading materials available. One woman is almost curled up like a cat, ostensibly quite comfortably. Or perhaps she is comforting herself. The other woman appears to be on the lookout for, or on the trail of, something important.

After a moment,

DOGGED WOMAN:

I don't understand.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What don't you understand?

DOGGED WOMAN:

What was it he said?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What do you mean?

DOGGED WOMAN:

What did he say?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

You don't understand what he said?

DOGGED WOMAN:

No, I *understand* ... It's just... How could he say that?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I don't know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I don't understand.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

There's nothing *to* understand.

DOGGED WOMAN:

What's to understand is *how*. Just... how could he?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Because he's an asshole?

DOGGED WOMAN:

No. Assholes don't fuck with reality like that.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Some assholes do.

DOGGED WOMAN:

But what did he say?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

You heard what he said.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Tell me what he said.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Why? You know what he said. What does it matter?

DOGGED WOMAN:

It matters.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

It's over. It can't matter.

DOGGED WOMAN:

To me!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Why?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Pleeeeeease!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

"That conversation never took place."

Pause.

DOGGED WOMAN:

That conversation never took place.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

That conversation never took place.

Pause.

DOGGED WOMAN:

He said that?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

He said that.

DOGGED WOMAN:

How could he say that?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I don't know, because he's an—

DOGGED WOMAN:

(interrupting) But he wasn't part of the conversation, right? The conversation was between you and the other guy, right? So how can he say the conversation never took place? He has no place saying that! He can't know, it wasn't his conversation, he wasn't there! *(short pause)* He wasn't there, was he?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

He wasn't there.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Not that *that* really matters. Because he's saying the conversation *never* took place. Ever. You guys never, ever had the conversation. Even out of his presence or knowledge. That conversation never actually happened. That's what he's saying.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

So how can he say that?!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I've no idea.

DOGGED WOMAN:

It's incredible!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

We'll, I do have an idea. I told you, he's an—

DOGGED WOMAN:

But think about it! This, okay, *asshole*, feels like he can issue a proclamation and erase the existence of an entire conversation. How can someone do that?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

He's just that way.

DOGGED WOMAN:

And that makes it all right?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

No, that makes him— exactly who he is and there's nothing I can do about the kind of ... person he chooses to be.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Well, I would be furious.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I've moved past it.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I wouldn't be able to. My anger would keep me rooted.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

It's not worth it.

DOGGED WOMAN:

"That conversation never took place." That makes me so angry. I can't believe someone could say that! It wasn't his conversation!!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

It wasn't your conversation, either.

DOGGED WOMAN:

But I'm not telling you it never took place!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

It doesn't matter!

DOGGED WOMAN:

It *does* matter! This guy's obviously some kind of megalomaniac who tries to pull people's rugs of reality right out from under 'em. His world is *the* world, and if he says it, it's so. Ohhhhhhhhhh I know people like this guy. I've married people like this guy. This is a dangerous guy and we can't let him get away with this!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

How about I'll just avoid him.

DOGGED WOMAN:

It's not that easy. That conversation never took place, that night never happened, I never did that, you don't feel that way...

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

It actually is that easy. Or almost that easy. I'm not working with him anymore, so it's in my past. I may run into him, but *he - doesn't - matter*.

The curled-up woman resolutely shifts her weight to punctuate the end of the argument.

DOGGED WOMAN:

He doesn't matter, or *it* doesn't matter?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Because it's two different things.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Neither, none. He doesn't matter, the conversation doesn't matter, nothing matters. It's over, I'm done.

DOGGED WOMAN:

The conversation doesn't matter?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

You said the conversation doesn't matter.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Right. None of it matters.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Which conversation?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Which conversation doesn't matter?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What are you talking about?

DOGGED WOMAN:

That's what I'm asking you. Which conversation do you mean doesn't matter?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I don't understand.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Which doesn't matter: the initial conversation with that other guy that supposedly never took place, or the conversation with our would-be godhead in which he denied the occurrence of said conversation?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Oh, Jesus. Are you hungry? I'm hungry.

DOGGED WOMAN:

The reason I ask is because I'm not sure you really give yourself enough credit. Your feelings, your experiences, your *self*.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Do you want a Cappuccino or something? Is there a machine somewhere?

DOGGED WOMAN:

I worry about you! The fact that you let this guy dictate what did and didn't happen in your life is very disturbing to me! And then to say "It doesn't matter, it's over, I've moved *past* it?" How can you move past something if it never happened? That's of great concern!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

How long has it been since ...? We missed lunch, didn't we.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Are you listening here? I'm telling you this is not right, something is not right and as such cannot be moved past—if indeed it took place—so you need to take a look at it and ask yourself really hard questions like “How?” and “Why?” and “It *does* matter! It matters a great deal, god damn it!”

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

That last isn't even a question.

DOGGED WOMAN:

“How?” and “Why?” are questions. Start with those.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Because you're worried about me?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Because I'm worried about you.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

This all comes out of your great concern?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Yes.

After a moment, the curled-up woman stretches, relaxing back into her seat with a satisfied smile. Then the dogged woman gets a new scent.

Unless ...!

She looks to the curled-up woman, as if for permission.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Uh huh...

DOGGED WOMAN:

Unless he was *told* the conversation never took place.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Maybe the other guy told him you two never had the conversation. Maybe it was the first guy who denied the whole thing, maybe that's where this all started!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

That is not where this all started.

DOGGED WOMAN:

But if he was lied to, then it makes sense! “*That conversation never took place.*”

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

The conversation *did* take place.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Oh, I know that. But maybe *he* didn't know that! If he was *told* it never took place, how was he to *know* it took place?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

There were witnesses.

DOGGED WOMAN:

To the conversation?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Yes. There were at least three, four people in the room. I know for a fact that Vicki heard the conversation.

DOGGED WOMAN:

But did he ever talk to Vicki?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Of course he talked to Vicki, what do you mean did he talk to Vicki?

DOGGED WOMAN:

I mean, I know he *talked* to Vicki, but by this time—this was like weeks into the whole mess, right?—she *knew* he was an asshole and wouldn't have anything to do with him, right? So there wouldn't really have been an opportunity for her to confirm *or* deny this particular conversation, would there? I mean, during the time in question.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

All right. If that were the case, wouldn't he just have said "What's-his-bucket said he never said that"?

DOGGED WOMAN:

No. Remember it's not the content that's in question, it's the entire exchange.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Right! (*short pause*) What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

He would've said "What's-his-bucket said '*That conversation never*'—"

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

(*interrupting*) Right!! And, okay, here's something else. This wasn't an isolated incident. Because now I'm remembering she said it too—that hideous woman he works with. This must be like their mantra, how they live, how they get by, how they rationalize their actions. I actually think I have it from her lips, in an email: "*That conversation never took place!*"

DOGGED WOMAN:

Those exact words?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Or close. About an entirely *different* conversation! And she also said it over the phone yet *another* time!

DOGGED WOMAN:

A third conversation?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Yes! Is that insane, or what? These people are truly satanic!

DOGGED WOMAN:

Because none of these conversations took place?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

According to them! Unbelievable, isn't it? Don't they know how this makes them look? It's crazy! And crazy-making. *God* am I glad I'm out of there!

The curled-up woman is now rigid, sitting completely upright.

DOGGED WOMAN:

It is difficult when stories don't match up.

Pause.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What?

DOGGED WOMAN:

There are two sides to every story and when you've got powerful people up against each other...

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

No, no. There are no "stories" here. We're talking about facts. Things that happened, stuff that was done, conversations that were *had*.

DOGGED WOMAN:

"Took place..."

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Yes! Took place! Conversations that... What is going on here?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Nothing's going on here!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

What are you trying to do here?

DOGGED WOMAN:

I'm not trying to do anything! Like I said, like *you* said, the whole tale is laughable and I'm just trying to see both sides—

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

(interrupting) There's no both sides! There's only one side! The side that took place! My side! And let me tell you that the only power these people have is in their own altered universe which is not in any way something to laugh at if you're caught up in it! Do you see me laughing? Do you?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Sweetie, calm down! I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get you upset! Of course! You're right! I'm sorry! I'm really, really sorry!

The curled-up woman is literally on the edge of her seat if not standing, and appears to be ready to leave. Then settles back into a sitting position.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

DOGGED WOMAN:

No, it was me. It was my fault. You said you were done with this and I dredged it all up again.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

No, I am done with it. It's just so... I shouldn't have lost it. I'm sorry. But these were really horrible people.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I know.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

And it took a lot for me to be *able* to move past them, you know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I know!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

So it catches me off guard when I sense they're still trying to get their nasty little claws into me.

DOGGED WOMAN:

They are from the worst kind of hell!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

But the truth is they can't touch me! I've left them far, far behind!

DOGGED WOMAN:

Right!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Right!

DOGGED WOMAN:

Yes! And who cares what anyone else says or believes, right? I mean, *you're* the one who knows what actually happened!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Right. I know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I know.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

And Vicki. She knows.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Vicki knows!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

And the other witnesses know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Of course! The other witnesses! To the conversation!

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Right!

Pause.

DOGGED WOMAN:

And the other conversations?

Pause.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

The other conversations?

DOGGED WOMAN:

The other conversations. Were there witnesses to the other conversations? The other conversations that never took place?

Pause.

Not that it matters.

Pause.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

No. It doesn't matter. (*short pause*) It doesn't matter one bit.

Really long pause, until

End of Play