

About What Matters
a short, pointed play between two women

by Jennie Webb

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About What Matters

- Synopsis:** A short, pointed play about, among other things, priorities, boundaries, pursuits, barriers and letting life get to you when weighing what's real.
- Characters:** THE DOGGED WOMAN, who enthusiastically pursues and doesn't give up easily; and

THE CURLED-UP WOMAN, who usually manages to convince herself she doesn't want what doesn't come to her.
- Setting:** A seating area inside or near a formidable building that probably has something to do with the government.
- Time:** Well after lunchtime.

About What Matters

We see two women and a bench inside or adjacent to an official-looking building. One woman is curled up on the bench like a cat, ostensibly quite comfortably. Or perhaps she is comforting herself. Her coat is on her lap like a blanket. Her handbag is close to her. Unfettered by belongings, the other woman is standing. She appears to be on the lookout for, or on the trail of, something important. And can't remain still forever.

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 it was.

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:

I told you what he said.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Tell me again.

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.

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 guy who was here last week, right? So how can he say the conversation never took place? He has no right 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 outside of his presence or knowledge. That conversation never actually happened. That's what he's saying.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I know.

DOGGED WOMAN:

Where did he come up with 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:

(interrupting) But think about it! This, okay, *asshole*, feels like he can issue a proclamation and erase the existence of an entire conversation. That's not part of his job description. How can someone do that?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I guess 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! How long have we been coming here, trying to...? This guy's obviously some kind of megalomaniac who likes 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:

It's almost over, how 'bout I just stay out of it.

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. It's out of his hands now, so we move on. We'll get the papers, everything will go through. So even if I run into him again, *he - doesn't - matter.*

The curled-up woman shifts her weight to punctuate the end of the argument. Perhaps she opens her handbag. The dogged woman sits next to her.

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:

The approval is what matters. The stamp, the seal, the validation. But he doesn't matter, the conversation doesn't matter, nothing else matters. That'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 today with our would-be godhead in which he denied the occurrence of said conversation?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

Oh, Jesus. It's late. Are you hungry? I'm hungry.

She stands up with her handbag. The dogged woman pursues her.

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, even here, 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 ...? Did we even have lunch?

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:

So this all comes out of your great concern?

DOGGED WOMAN:

Yes.

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

Unless ...!

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. Vicki was here earlier.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I mean, I know he *talked* to Vicki, or imagine she heard him talk, but I'll bet she could tell he was an asshole and didn't want anything to do with him. So I'm guessing she was in and out of there and there wouldn't really be an opportunity for her to weigh in on this particular conversation. Would there? I mean, did she say anything to you?

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

All right. If that were the case, wouldn't he just have said to me "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, standing up*) Right!! And, okay, here's something else. This wasn't an isolated incident. Because now I'm remembering that the other, hideous woman with him in there today said it too. Earlier, after we first started this whole thing. This must be like their mantra, how they live, how they get by, how they rationalize their actions, or non-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 you know, 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? Their whole operation look? It's crazy! And crazy-making. *God* will I be glad when I'm through with this.

The curled-up woman gathers her coat and handbag.

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." 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?

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 despite their desks and forms and "come back tomorrows" the only power these people truly have is in their own altered universe, but it's still not anything 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!

After a moment,

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:

I am done with it. It's just so... I shouldn't have lost it. I'm sorry. But these are really horrible people.

DOGGED WOMAN:

I know.

CURLED-UP WOMAN:

I feel like this has been going on forever and it takes a lot for me to be *able* to move past it, 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! Even if I never get their goddamned validation, I've already 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.

Facing away from the dogged woman on the bench, the curled-up woman stands and holds onto her belongings with a new air of desperation.

It doesn't matter one bit.

Really long pause, until

End of Play