

The End of Civilization As We Know It

A One-Act Play by Lydia Stryk

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Characters.

Edith

Bea

The time is the present. The setting is a waiting area.

Author's Note.

'The End of Civilization as We Know it' is about two women who have led long, secret lives. This should be reflected in the style of the piece-- the contained, secretive, controlled nature of their being with one another in the public world, reflected in the dialogue which is undemonstrative, never effusive. Looking over their shoulder to see if anyone is around or looking is second nature to them. The play is a recounting of what was forbidden and remains so. The past lives on in their present lives. The things these women are saying are highly charged, passionate and erotic, but their expression is hushed, hinted, simply stated. An economy of expression, gesture, touch, that hidden gay people have lived with and refined to a high art. It might well be that they do not touch each other at all until the stage direction calls for it at the end of the play. Or there may be a flicker of a hand over the other's cheek, so quick and light that it could be missed by the audience.

(Two women in their seventies dressed for a celebration sit together in a waiting area.)

EDITH

Do you remember *your* wedding day?

BEA

Of course, I do.

EDITH

Just checking.

BEA

And I remember my beautiful maid of honor, too.

EDITH

I was beautiful.

BEA

Are beautiful.

EDITH

Am beautiful.

BEA

My beauty.

EDITH

You made your mother leave the room.

BEA

That's right. So you could help me dress.

EDITH

Well, *undress*, first . . .

BEA

And then and there. I confessed my love.

EDITH

You were naked in my arms.

BEA

And then I started to sob.

EDITH

You couldn't stop. You choked on your tears. And you wouldn't let go. Remember that?
You clung and clung.

BEA

You pulled away. And then you said—

EDITH

I said.

One day. You'll be *my* wife. One day you'll be *my* wife. You're *mine*. You're *mine*.
You're *my* wife.

You're *my* life. Not his.

BEA

You kicked a chair across the room.

EDITH

I banged the wall with my head.

BEA

It bled and bled.

EDITH

Blood everywhere.

BEA

Blood on my dress.

(a pause)

Poor Pete.

EDITH

Poor Petey. Poor you and me.

BEA

It was not a happy day.

(a pause)

EDITH

Remember Larry's birth?

BEA

You held my hands.

EDITH

I was screaming.

BEA

Like it was *you* giving birth.

EDITH

My son.

BEA

And then you fainted clean away.

(a pause)

EDITH

Twenty years.

BEA

In and out of each other's kitchens.

EDITH

In and out of each other's arms.

BEA

(hurt) *Your* marriage.

EDITH

Served you right. I gave in. We became two wives.

BEA

You broke my heart.

EDITH

Another marriage. Doomed from the start.

BEA

You had the twins.

EDITH

Well, there was that.

BEA

Two young mothers with secret lives.

EDITH

All those years. And we never got caught.

BEA

(appalled at EDITH's memory lapse) That time in the playground.

EDITH

Oh, Lord.

BEA

You forgot.

The sunlight was dancing in your eyes. I'd never seen such a beautiful face.

EDITH

All sound stopped. No playground, kids.

BEA

I scooped you up with my tongue.

EDITH

And then . . .

BEA

Mrs. Larson appeared. Out of nowhere!

EDITH

The Treasurer of the Ladies Church Bazaar. And you said . . .

BEA

“Mrs. Larsen! Won’t you join us?”

EDITH

She stood like a stone.

BEA

I was quaking inside.

EDITH

She shut her eyes. She turned on her heels. Her back like a blade.

BEA

I was shaking all over.

EDITH

You wouldn’t let us leave together.

BEA

One stroller one way, one stroller the other.

EDITH

(impressed, taking BEA in) You’d never dared kiss me in public before.

BEA

I never dared kiss you in public again.

(A long pause.)

BEA (cont)

(still in the memory) That night, I couldn't sleep for fear. She'd tell the world on us.
And they'd . . .

EDITH

They'd what?

BEA

Tear us limb from limb. Set the dogs on us. Well, take away our kids.

EDITH

Oh, Bea . . .

BEA

I was quite sure, Edith, they were going to kill us. I had this dream. I never told you. A mob with torches. Mrs. Larson at the head. Lighting a ring of fire around us. Chanting we should die . . .

(a pause)

But it gets worse.

EDITH

Bea—

BEA

When I woke up. I wanted to run. And then . . .

(she struggles)

TO READ THE WHOLE PLAY AND FOR ANY OTHER INQUIRES,
PLEASE CONTACT info@lydiastryk.com

