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from Mrs. Packard

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ILLINOIS, 1861. A theatrical space that will become many places. 
A grated window. Bolted doors. The full company rings the space 
above. Tight white light up on The Judge.

THE JUDGE
The case on trial at Kankakee City, Illinois. January 11, 1864.
Upon the motion of the Hon. Charles B. Starr, presiding, it is 
ordered that an issue be formed as to the sanity or insanity of 
Mrs. Elizabeth P.W. Packard and that a jury of twelve men will 
aid in the investigation of said issue. The court will come to 
order in the matter of PACKARD VS. PACKARD.

Sound of a GAVEL. LIGHTS CHANGE. MCFARLAND’S 
OFFICE. THE ASYLUM

REVEREND THEOPHILUS PACKARD, 57, with DR. MC 
FARLAND, 50. THEO is very upset.

DR. MCFARLAND
And who will care for your children, Reverend Packard, while 
your wife is confined?

THEOPHILUS
My sister lives near us and though she has children of her own, 
she—she offered... (DOCTOR: “I see.”) And s-s-ome of the women 
in my congregation offered to—to help as well, (THEO trying not 
to break down) and the older children will—

DR. MCFARLAND
Yes... I’m sure.

THEOPHILUS
Can you help my wife, Doctor?

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DR. MCFARLAND
I will know more after my examination of her...

THEOPHILUS
Yes, yes. Of course.

DR. MCFARLAND
But cases like your wife’s are a specialty of mine here at Jacksonville. (THEO: (hoarsely) Really?) Tell me, though, Reverend, are you quite certain you have tried every avenue with your wife to keep her behavior in check?

THEOPHILUS
I do not know what else to do. It is very difficult to leave her here, but I fear for the children’s spiritual and physical welfare. (DR. MCFARLAND: I see.) She flies into rages, Doctor. I can no longer control her, and I fear I may now lose my present church.

DR. MCFARLAND
Your ‘present church’? Has this happened before, sir?

THEOPHILUS
Oh, yes. We have had to move three times in the last ten years due to my wife’s behavior. I love my wife, Doctor. For years, she was a good wife and mother and a help-mate to me in my church, but now I—I—

KNOCK ON THE DOOR. MRS. BONNER, AN IRISH MATRON, STICKS HER HEAD IN.

MRS. BONNER
Doctor?

DR. MCFARLAND
Mrs. Bonner.

MRS. BONNER
I have Mrs. Packard with me. Shall I bring her in?
DR. MCFARLAND

Yes, yes... Reverend, please remain quiet during my examination of your wife. She may be upset, but let me handle—

ELIZABETH, 43, AND VERY BEAUTIFUL ENTERS, HAIR FLYING, IN A RAGE. SHE PULLS AWAY FROM BONNER.

ELIZABETH

Don’t you touch me! (seeing Theo) Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater had a wife and couldn’t keep her... (SHE CONTINUES OVER)

DOCTOR MCFARLAND

Mrs. Packard?

THEOPHILUS

Elizabeth, don’t...(gets up)

ELIZABETH

Put her in a pumpkin shell

THEOPHILUS

Stop it.

ELIZABETH

And there he kept her very well.

A PAUSE. SHE AND THEO LOOK AT EACH OTHER. SILENCE. THEO TURNS AWAY.

DR. MCFARLAND

Mrs. Packard? I am Dr. Andrew McFarland, Superintendent of Jacksonville Insane Asylum.

SHE TURNS (“Oh?”)

DR. MCFARLAND

Welcome. (SHE does not know whether to laugh) I should like to have a discussion with you, Mrs. Packard, with your husband present before he leaves you here with us. (ELIZ: But Doctor—) I wish to assure you— you will in future be in...my personal care.
HE OFFERS HIS HAND, INDICATES A SEAT. THEY MEET EYES.

ELIZABETH
(suddenly girlish, almost flirtatious)
Really? I am so glad to hear it—that I would be in your personal care. However, I don’t belong here. (DR: Ah, yes?) (laughs, with irony:) Yes. I don’t know why it is, Doctor,—it may be merely a foolish pride—but I can’t help feeling an instinctive aversion to being called insane. There seems to be a kind of disparagement of intellect attending this idea, which seems to stain the purity and darken the luster of the reputation forever after. Don’t you agree?

DR. MCFARLAND
(struck by her intelligence and charm)
No, no, Mrs. Packard, this is not necessarily so. Even some of the most renowned and gifted minds in the world have been insane, and their reputation and character are still revered and respected—some of our greatest poets even—

ELIZABETH
Indeed. Yes... How true—

(SHE tries to bolt)

DR. MCFARLAND
Your husband and I have had a long talk this morning (ELIZ: “Have you?...”) and he tells me that your father thought it right to educate you as well as his sons! (ELIZ: “Yes.”) So you, my good woman, have a great love of reading and intellectual discourse. Is that right?

ELIZABETH
Yes. Quite right.

DR. MCFARLAND
Well, I intend for you to enjoy special privileges while you are here, Mrs. Packard, and will be sure to furnish you with books of your choosing and perhaps you and I will be able to converse together as well. I should like that.
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ELIZABETH
Why, thank you, Doctor. How kind of you. Though my Bible would be my most cherished book.

DR. MCFARLAND
Of course. I—I did not mean to suggest otherwise. (looking in his file) I do hope you slept well and that the plain food of the asylum will agree with you.

ELIZABETH
Quite frankly, doctor, though my room is clean, my bed is narrow and hard and I am unused to sleeping alone.

(THEO shifts uncomfortably. The DOCTOR looks up, smiles.)

DR. MCFARLAND
Really? ...I understand.

ELIZABETH
When I ceased, only recently, to have the warmth of my once dear husband in bed beside me, I brought the youngest of my children into bed with me so that I could sleep. This my husband well knows. So, no, I did not sleep well, I thank you. I could not.

DR. MCFARLAND
I hope that will improve as you get used to your new surroundings. (MRS. PACKARD bolts.) Please stay seated, Mrs. Packard...Mrs. Packard, how many children do you have?

ELIZABETH
We have 6 children, five boys and a girl. The oldest is 18 years old and the youngest 18 months. (to Theo) All except the oldest were living at home the morning I was abducted.

DR. MCFARLAND
Abducted? Isn’t that a rather strong word?

ELIZABETH
No, no I don’t think so. Yesterday, while I was having my bath, I
looked out the window and saw two strong-men, a sheriff, two doctors and my husband walking up the path towards the front door. They entered the house, and proceeded to climb up the stairs to my bedroom door. Theophilus shouted they were coming in! Alarmed, I said: please wait. I am not dressed. He said: they would not wait, they were taking me away to the insane asylum, and I had better unlock the door or they would break it down. They proceeded to hack down the door with an axe. I ran under the covers completely naked, my heart racing, as any proper woman’s would be under the circumstances—

DR. MCFARLAND
Surely.

ELIZABETH
Then one of the doctors took my hand and said “Her pulse is very quick” and pronounced me insane. The second doctor did the same. When I said to my husband ‘you can’t do this; I am perfectly sane, and you know it!’ he told me to get dressed at once. When I refused to walk downstairs to the waiting wagon, the two strong men carried me onto the wagon and when we arrived at the station, they carried me off the wagon onto the waiting train. (pause) I was abducted, Doctor. Don’t you agree?

DOCTOR MCFARLAND
(nods)
I see you did not come on your own volition, Mrs. Packard.

A beat.

ELIZABETH
...I assume I am here because I disagree with my husband’s theological views, and I voiced those disagreements in Bible class?

DR. MCFARLAND
No, no, you are here, Mrs. Packard, because your husband is concerned about your sanity, and wants you to have professional care. [SHE gets up, upset.]

ELIZABETH
...Doctor... my husband is jealous! He’s jealous of my ability to
reach people because he cannot. (THEO: Now, wait just one...) His congregation is dwindling, Doctor. (DR. MCFARLAND: Sit down, Mrs. Packard.) There were four men in the Bible class before I went and encouraged healthy discussion. There were 42 animated men and women when I was told to stop six weeks later, and it would have grown larger. Wouldn't it, Mr. Packard? (THEO: Stop it.) For the first time, we all freely questioned Calvinist doctrine, something my husband absolutely cannot abide, but Doctor! The Christ I worship and love would not have an infant damned once he had taken his first breath, nor blame women for all that is evil in the world, and I am not insane for thinking so!! Surely you, as an educated man, must know this!!

THEOPHILUS
You see, Doctor? There is no controlling her. She flies into these fits frequently. This is what I have been living with and—

DR. MCFARLAND
(he gently signals Theo to calm down) Yes, Mr. Packard... Mrs. Packard, did you ever publicly defy your husband?

LONG PAUSE.

THEOPHILUS
She did.

SHE sits.

ELIZABETH
I did.

DR. MCFARLAND
Go on.

ELIZABETH
(very quiet)
Once when Mr. Packard was at the pulpit I asked for the congregation and the minister's blessing to leave the church and worship with the Methodists where my personal beliefs could be respected.
DR. MCFARLAND
(amazed, almost amused)
Your husband was at the pulpit? You made this request during Sunday service?

THEOPHILUS
She did. She exposed her perversity to full public view. The entire congregation saw she had gone mad.

ELIZABETH
Since neither the congregation nor my husband responded to my request, I left the church and crossed the street to worship with the Methodists, where I've worshipped happily until I was abducted yesterday morning.

DR. MCFARLAND
How long ago did you interrupt your husband's service, Mrs. Packard?

ELIZABETH
...Nine weeks ago.

DR. MCFARLAND
I see. And how long would you say your disagreements have caused—marital strife—between you and your husband?

ELIZABETH
The last year or so, I should think.

THEOPHILUS
The last ten years, at least. (ELIZABETH looks at him aghast.) Her mother was mad as well, Doctor, you should know, and Mrs. Packard herself was committed to an asylum once before, when she was young.

ELIZABETH
I was put in hospital for brain fever!—delirium and fever—not madness, as my husband well knows. And my mother was not mad, Doctor. That is completely false. She did weep often but that was understandable. She had lost four children in infancy, and she did grieve for them. (DR: Of course.) (with edge for Theo’s benefit)
She doubtless wept because she’d been taught her babies were damned for eternity!

**THEOPHILUS**

...As I told you, it is a clear case of moral perversity.

**DR. MCFARLAND**

(slowly) Yes, most insanity starts as such, and though moral perversity is an institutionable disorder, in most cases it can be cured ... if the patient is willing. (he rises) Reverend Packard, I leave you with your wife to say good-bye... Mrs. Packard, let me remind you that you will have every special privilege here while under my watch. Quite frankly, I don’t think you should be here very long.

SHE offers her hand. HE holds it for a moment, looking deeply into her eyes.

**ELIZABETH**

Doctor.

**DR. MCFARLAND**

It has been a... very great pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Packard. Truly.

He then nods to Theo as HE exits, leaving Theo with Elizabeth. There is a long silence. Neither speaks.

**LIGHTS CHANGE.**

**A MAN IN BLACK TESTIFIES.**

**CLERK**

Mr. Josephus Smith, you have been sworn.

**MR. SMITH**

I have been in charge of the Sunday School at Reverend Packard’s church since just before Mrs. Packard was taken to the asylum. Mrs. Packard was taken to the asylum three years ago. I was elected Superintendent of the school for the special purpose
of keeping Mrs. Packard straight. We all knew—the entire congregation knew—Mrs. Packard was insane. She thought she was the Holy Ghost!

LIGHTS CHANGE. Finally, with great control:

ELIZABETH
You see, husband, the doctor does not think me mad.

THEOPHILUS
You are wrong there, Mrs. Packard. Believe me.

(ANOTHER PAUSE, then quietly:)

ELIZABETH
Theophilus, how can you do this to the mother of your children?

THEOPHILUS
It is for your own good—and quite obviously—for the good of the children.

ELIZABETH
That’s simply not true! What will the children do without their mother? What about my baby?! Arthur cannot be separated from me now.

THEOPHILUS
My sister will help and Libby will be helpful as well.

ELIZABETH
Libby is only ten years old, Theo. She’s a little girl! She cannot manage a household. Do you want to make her mad?

THEOPHILUS
I am well aware of her age, Mrs. Packard. The children will be well cared for, and they will soon get used to it.

ELIZABETH
They will not ‘get used to it’ and neither shall I!
THEOPHILUS
You are very ill, Elizabeth, and you are harming the children.

ELIZABETH
I am not ill, husband, and well you know it!

THEOPHILUS
You left my church screaming epithets to people on the street, Mrs. Packard. This was not sane behavior; this was not fitting behavior for a minister's wife, nor is it fitting behavior for the mother of my children!

ELIZABETH
Theo, I understand why you are angry with me. I should not have so publicly disagreed with you and left your church. It was a great betrayal and a great humiliation and I am sorry for it. But you never allow me to think for myself and believe what I believe. I had no recourse.

THEOPHILUS
No recourse! Mrs. Packard, look what you have done!

ELIZABETH
Theo, let us talk—together—at home, in the privacy of our home.

THEOPHILUS
I gave you fair warning, Elizabeth, but you would not relent. I tried and clearly I failed.

ELIZABETH
Husband, do you know where you are leaving me? This is a prison. Theo, I am begging you. The matron threw me to the floor this morning! Theo, please. I shall die here.

MRS. BONNER LISTENS OUTSIDE THE DOOR.

THEOPHILUS
You are getting hysterical. Sit down. I don't want them to have to restrain you again.
SHE starts to pace the room, manic.

ELIZABETH
The children can’t possibly cope without me! We adore each other, the children and I. It’s the reason I’m alive, Theo, to be a mother, to care for my little ones. Dear God, I shall die here without my babies. (HE puts his head in his hands) Don’t you have any tender feelings left for me? I slept in your bed for 21 years, I bore you 6 beautiful children, I kept a spotless, loving Christian home for you. Please let me think just one thing for myself. Let me follow my own beliefs. Or, no, no! From now on, I will keep my thoughts hidden. I promise. No one will ever know what I feel inside. Please take me home, grant me this one favor, and I will bless you forever. I will be forever in your debt. I’ll do anything, anything. Please, Theo! Theo, I’m begging you. (she looks at him across the room) Why won’t you answer!? (she looks closer)Are you asleep?...

THEOPHILUS
I’m sorry. I have been broken of my rest.

ELIZABETH
(laughing and crying)... You have been broken of your rest!? (she pulls herself together) I see... Clearly, it’s no use saying anything more...

THEOPHILUS
I am sorry to hear you talk so. I had dearly hoped we should have at least a pleasant parting. I hope some day you will see that I, too, had no recourse. ... In answer to your question of your having the right to think your own thoughts, my answer to you is this, Elizabeth, as I have told you repeatedly. You may think your own thoughts when you are thinking right. And once you are thinking right, you may return home. You endanger the souls of your family and yourself, as you are now. [HE thinks of embracing her but she turns from him.] Good-day, wife. I sincerely hope... you will be cured.

HE EXITS. ELIZABETH STARTS SOBBING. MRS. BONNER ENTERS TO GUARD HER AND SITS. MRS. BONNER WATCHES HER TURMOIL.
(A SILENCE as SHE watches her. ELIZABETH glares at her.) Ye didn’t get yer way, didja? You fancy ladies never do.

ELIZABETH
I thank you to keep your opinions to yourself.

BONNER
Oh, wouldja now?

ELIZABETH
He’s the crazy one. Not me. He is totally depraved.

BONNER
But he’s the one leavin’, darling, livin’ in the world.

ELIZABETH
I’ll get my day in court, Mrs. Bonner. You’ll see.

BONNER
Yer day in court, huh? Ye’ll get yer day in court when Hell freezes over and Lucifer dies by his own hand, that’s when ye’ll get yer day in court, dearie. (she amuses herself)

LIGHTS CHANGE.

A WOMAN IN A BLACK BONNET SITS ON THE WITNESS STAND.

MRS. DOLE
I am Mrs. Sybil Dole, Mr. Packard’s sister.

MR. HASLET
Mrs. Dole—did you ever see your sister-in-law behave in a manner that made you think her mad?

MRS. DOLE
(with great indignation)
Yes. One evening we were sitting at table.
BELL SOUNDS FOR BREAKFAST. WOMEN ENTER PUSHING ON A LONG TABLE.

MRS. BONNER
Alright! Come on, ladies. Step to it! (She takes out a stick from her belt and slams it on the table.)

MRS. DOLE
Mrs. Packard was talking about religion.

MRS. BONNER
You! The new girl! (she points to Elizabeth) Over there.

ELIZABETH GOES WHERE DIRECTED TO A TABLE WHERE THERE ARE TWO OTHER WOMEN—NEAT, MIDDLE-CLASS, BETWEEN 40 AND 70 YEARS OLD. MRS. STOCKTON PICKS AT THE DRY FOOD IN FRONT OF HER, SMILES AT ELIZABETH. MRS. CHAPMAN GREETS HER WITH A NOD. ELIZABETH WHISPERS A QUESTION TO HER.

MRS. DOLE
She became very excited. When Mr. Packard remonstrated with her, she became extremely angry and told him she would talk what and when she had a mind to. Said she would not sit with us if we regarded her insane.

MRS. BONNER
No talkin’!

MRS. DOLE
She then put her hand on my shoulder and said she would thank me to leave her house! She rose up from the table, said she would have ‘no fellowship with the unfruitful work of darkness’... took her teacup, and left the room in great violence.

A WOMAN FROM THE OTHER TABLE, FULL OF WOMEN FROM WARD #8, THE VIOLENT WARD, STARTS SCREAMING AND WAVING HER CUP, BANGING IT AND WAVING IT. THEN SHE COMES RUNNING OVER TO ELIZABETH, AND TRIES TO HIT HER WITH THE CUP.
MRS. BONNER
Stop that, ya little tit!

MRS. BONNER RESTRAINS THE WOMAN AND STARTS TO BEAT HER AND KICK HER INTO SUBMISSION. THE OTHERS MAKE A RACKET WHILE SHE DOES.

MRS. BONNER
Silence! Eat yer food. And sit up straight alla yas. Or you’ll grow hunchbacked like the auld ladies sittin’ over there! You wouldn’t like to look like any o’ them now, wouldja?

SHE LAUGHS. MRS. BONNER SAUNTERS OVER TO ELIZABETH’S TABLE, STOPPING BEHIND ELIZABETH.

MRS. BONNER
(to the women at the table for Ward #8 )
What do we think of the new girl? She looks a bit waek to me. (to Elizabeth) Are you the waek one, Mrs. Packard? (pause) Don’t answer right now. Think on it. We’ll talk tomorrow... and the day after that. I’ll check up on ya...Every day...

BONNER MOVES ON. THE WOMEN AT ELIZABETH’S TABLE CONNECT TO HER SYMPATHETICALLY WITH THEIR EYES. MRS. CHAPMAN PATS ELIZABETH’S HAND.

ELIZABETH
Oh, dear God. You’re as sane as I am, aren’t you?

MRS. CHAPMAN
That’s right, dear.