

**The Redemption
Of
Jessie Murdoch**

A play in one act

Written by Les Clarke

SPOTLIGHT PUBLICATIONS

The Redemption of Jessie Murdoch

CAST (in order of appearance)

Jessie Murdoch. Male. Forties. Prone to mood changes. Sarcastic and sinister. He sometimes speeds up when he's talking but it usually only lasts for a sentence or two. He is dressed in jacket, t shirt, jeans and trainers. He wears mirrored sunglasses. He continually chews on a toothpick.

Rose Johnson. Female: Late twenties to early thirties. Tall, slim and reasonably attractive. She is wearing a blouse and long skirt. (Not tight fitting) She is submissive but very strong willed.

Place - Rose Johnson's lounge. The house is in a small town in America's mid-west.

Time - the present

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The front room of Rose Johnson's home. It is simply furnished with a table and two dining chairs. There is a rug under the table. The table is awash with paperwork, books, pieces of sewing, a coffee pot and a mug. There is a beat up old sofa down stage left and a bookcase with a muddle of paperback books scattered on the shelves up stage right. There is a door up stage left leading to the other rooms. The outside door is down stage right and opens inwards. (It only needs to be a freestanding doorframe & door) The room is poorly lit

Rose is sitting on the sofa reading. There is a briefcase type satchel alongside the sofa

Jessie ambles up to the door, he is wearing mirrored sunglasses. He stops and looks all around, when he is satisfied, he knocks on the door

Rose puts down her book, stands, walks over to the door and opens it a crack and peers around the door

Rose Yes?

Jessie (*friendly*) Hello, Rose.

Rose (*doesn't recognise him*) Do I know you?

Jessie We've never actually met.

Rose So how d'ya know *me*?

Jessie We've talked on the phone.

Rose (*wary*) On the *phone*?

Jessie (*nods*) 'S right.

Rose (*a little uncertain*) I don't recall ...

Jessie On more than *one* occasion, actually.

Rose I'm sorry I ... I don't recall ... (*She shakes her head*)

Jessie Well, don't you pay it no never mind, Rose.

Rose But, how d'ya know my address?

Jessie Ain't hard to figure, ya put yer mind on it.

Rose (*wary*) Look, what's this all about ...

She half turns and gestures behind her

I got chores ...

Jessie (*cutting in*) Might be better I jest stepped inside, Rose.

He moves forward and Rose tries closing the door, Jessie blocks it with his foot

Rose No I ...

Jessie (*cutting in*) We need to talk, Rose.

She pushes the door; Jessie looks down at his foot then slowly back up at her

Now that ain't neighbourly, Rose.

Rose I need to know what cha want! You're *scaring* me!

Jessie Ain't no need for ya to be scared now, Rose; we jest need to talk, s'all.

Rose (*pushing on the door. Firmly*) Would you remove yer foot, please!

Jessie (*irritably*) Now don't you go getting ornery with me now, Rose!

Rose (*panicking*) Look, if you don't get yer foot outta my door I'll call my husband!

Jessie (*firm, talks fast*) Now, we both know Wayne left fer work twenty minutes ago, Rose, so don't you go *shitting* me! (*Back to normal*) You're on yer own, Rose; there ain't no-one else here.

Her face folds. He puts both hands on the door

Seems like I got your attention now, don't it? So why don't cha jest invite me on in and try putting a smile on in case old man Jacobs is *twitching* the drapes and wondering what the hell kind of mystery is

unfolding on yer porch. (A beat) You step back inside now, Rose ... nice and easy, ya hear?

He pushes the door

Don't forget that *smile*, Rose.

Rose backs into the room. Jessie looks all around and then walks in and gently closes the door

Want so hard to do now, was it?

He stands and looks around the room, amazed

Well, goddamn it all! This ain't *so grand* ... I figured ya fer more'n this, Rose. (A beat) Hell, ain't no better 'n my place.

Rose What d'ya want ... (She moves towards the table) I've got some money in my purse, not much ...

Jessie (*cutting in, hard*) I don't want yer damn money, Rose! I ain't no thief! That what cha got me figured as? Some kinda goddamn *thief*!

Rose (*stops, awkward*) No! No, I didn't mean ... I ... I jest don't know what ...

Jessie (*cutting in*) Why don't cha jest take the weight off yer feet Rose?

He moves forward and pulls out one of the chairs. She stands not moving

Now I ain't in the business of asking twice, Rose.

He lifts the chair a short way up and bangs it down

Come *sit*!

She moves forward and sits. Her hands are clasped in her lap

(*Meaningful*) What cha don't wanna do, Rose, is "piss me off." I get pissed off 'bout something, my mind don't always think straight. You gettin' my drift here, Rose?

He looks at her hard; she nods quickly then hangs her head

Ain't no good you nodding at me, Rose, I like to hear them words. Say ya understand me, Rose, cos what I *don't want*, is a breakdown in communication 'tween us.

Rose (A beat) Yes ... I understand.

Jessie Well that's fine then, long's we understand each other.

Rose (a beat) What d'ya *want* from me?

He moves forward and stands behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders, she stiffens

Jessie Now, Rose ... I don't recall giving ya permission to ask *me* questions? D'ya remember me doing that, Rose? Do ya? (She shakes her head) Now, *Rose*, you hold it right there! *Shaking* yer head is as bad as *nodding* yer head! Ya need to speak to me, Rose, I like to hear the words. Thought we jest got that settled 'tween us?

Rose I'm sorry, I'm sorry! (A beat) No ... no you didn't give me permission.

Jessie (*Takes his hands off her shoulders and stands back pleased*) See that's how it all *works*, Rose. Ain't no *big* thing conversation an' understandin' once ya got the ground rules set.

He moves forward again and puts his hands back on her shoulders and starts to gently massage

Now Rose, I need to find out 'bout cha, what makes you *tick*. So what d'ya like doing, Rose?

Rose (*hesitantly*) I'm ... I'm not sure what ya mean?

Jessie (*he stops massaging. Irritably*) Hell, Rose, it ain't a *hard* question! So I'm gonna ask ya again and I

jest need ya to listen up so ya can get the meanin' of it. (*Slightly pronounced*) "What d'ya like doing, Rose?"

Rose (*a beat*) Book reading an' ... an' sewing. Them's the things I like most of.

Jessie See! We're *communicating!* Like I told ya, ain't no big thing! (*He starts massaging again*) Talking ain't difficult, s'only words, it's *real* easy. (*A beat. Thoughtful*) Book reading and sewing. (*A beat*) D'ya go to church, Rose?

Rose Thanksgiving, for sure.

Jessie (*stops massaging*) Ya ain't a *regular* church-goer, Rose?

Rose Wayne don't put much store by it. He don't like me going.

Jessie (*scoffs*) An' yer a good wife, ain't cha, Rose? Always doing what *Wayne* tells ya an' all.

She nods. He yanks back on her hair and she cries out

Ya forgettin' what I told ya 'bout *noddin'*, Rose! What is it ya don't understand *exactly*?

Rose (*panicking*) I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I wasn't thinking.

Jessie Now don't be getting' yerself all riled up there, Rose. Ya jest gotta remember to do what I told ya to do, is all.

Rose (*meekly*) Yes.

Jessie (*starts massaging again*) Ya got a f-i-n-e neck, Rose. Got a nice shape to it.

He lets his hand run down her neck. Rose visibly stiffens. Talks quickly

Now don't you go tensing up on me, Rose Johnson, it spoils the look of ya!

He continues rubbing her neck. His fingers gradually sliding further and further down the front of her blouse

(*A beat*) Yer skin's as smooth as silk, Rose. Ain't *nothin'* compares to the feel of a woman's skin. (*He closes his eyes and tilts his head back*) Ya know I can feel yer body heat rising, Rose, rising right up through my hand, kinda, welcomin' *me*.

He continues to run his fingers up and down her neck and down the front of her blouse for another moment, then he stops and puts his hands back on her shoulders

Ya said ya like book reading, Rose. What kinda books ya like to read?

Rose (*She is thrown by this sudden change. A beat*) Uh ...thrillers mainly, I guess ... an' ... an' I do like adventure stories ...

Jessie Ya sayin' ya wanna escape yer *dull life* Rose, that it? You lookin' fer a *way out*?

Rose No! No ... I jest like them, that's all. It's jest readin'.

The Redemption of Jessie Murdoch

Les Clarke's powerful and moving two-hander for one man and one woman set in the American mid-west.

Plot Summary

The play is set in a small American town in the present day. Jessie Murdoch visits the home of Rose Johnson, a woman he has never seen before. Working to a personal agenda, he enters her home against her will and subjects her to a humiliating treatment both verbal and physical. In the end he crumbles under Rose's strength of will and refusal to give in.