

Miller Road

By

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## Cast of Characters

JANE FRASNON: the interviewer. Mid 50s, shrewd.

EDDIE WALTON: the novelist. Mid 30s, somewhat handsome, self-obsessed.

ROLAND BARTHES: the dead French philosopher. Mid 50s, greying, wry-looking and slightly rotund.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE: the press. Early 30s, playfully light.

JESSICA SWIFT: the ex-girlfriend. Mid 30s, serious and take-no-shit attitude.

BENJAMIN TODD: Late 30s - early 40s. Straight laced, proper.

ADAM:

ANNOUNCER:

Scene 1 - Avalon Airport

*The stage is in darkness. A video begins playing. A woman and a man sit across from each other in the video. They are on the pared-down set of a basic cable show. The woman is older, in her mid-fifties, and has a shrewd look in her eye. The man is younger, in his mid-thirties, wearing a flashy suit.*

JANE FRASNON

Good evening, I'm Jane Frasnnon and this is Behind the Author. Tonight my guest is the author of great reads such as Miller Road, A Summer in Brunswick, Dial Q for Quixotic, and many more. Eddie Walton, thank you for joining me.

*[Note: The stage is split in half with one side being a static set (Eddie's Hotel Room) and the other side alternating depending on the scene. The two sides are separated by a door.]*

*As the interview begins, half the stage is slowly lit up. We are in an airport. An older man is sleeping on an airport bench. A notebook is draped, half open, on his head.*

EDDIE WALTON

Thanks for having me, Jane.

JANE FRASNON

To start tonight, I wanted to ask about something from your upcoming book, *Je Suis*, which I have a copy of here.

*Frasnon holds the book up to the camera. Then opens to the early pages of the book.*

*The man on stage, ROLAND, sits up and displaces the book from his face. He is slightly rotund with slicked grey hair. His face is pale white, dark shadows surround his eyes. He wears a suit of grey tweed.*

JANE FRASNON (cont'd)

You begin the book with a quote from famed French philosopher Roland Barthes.

*Roland looks at the interview. When the name Roland Barthes is said, he looks to the audience.*

ROLAND BARTHES

*Ç'est moi.*

*The interview continues.*

(CONTINUED)

JANE FRASNON

"The explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author". Why Barthes and why that quote?

*As the interview plays, a woman, YVETTE, crosses the stage to stand near an entrance. She can't see Roland at all. She has a large sign held under her arm. She finds her place, plants herself and clutches the sign in both hands. On the sign, in big block letters, is the word EDDIE.*

EDDIE WALTON

The book is about this author and it explores ideas of authorship. The main thrust of the action involves the main character going to Paris and while there he steep himself in the intellectual history of France, including Roland Barthes, a French philosopher who has some very interesting ideas about authors.

*The interview begins to fade and is drowned out by the sound of plane engines whirring, then slowly fading. Soon after the sound fades, EDDIE, emerges from an entrance. Contrasting his earlier appearance, he is now scruffy and sloppily-dressed. Hung across him is a large sports bag, which contains all his luggage. Roland extends a hand to greet Eddie. Eddie looks at Roland briefly before completely blanking him. Yvette spots Eddie.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Eddie!

*Eddie spots Yvette and heads to her. When they meet, he hugs her. Roland returns to his seat, rather put-out, and begins writing in his notebook. On the screen, words appear:*

*Roland's List*

*(The list continues down the screen as he writes)*

*'Casablanca', 'Liar, Liar', 'Catch Me If You Can', 'Love, Actually', 'The Terminal', 'The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul', 'American Gods', 'Miller Road', and so on.*

EDDIE WALTON

Yvette? What are you doing here?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

I came to pick you up.

EDDIE WALTON

How'd you know I'd be here?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You left a message with Jess and she sent me in her place.

EDDIE WALTON

You still talk with Jess?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Oh yeah, we sort of bonded when you left for New York.

*An awkward silence falls between them. Yvette breaks it.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

So, what brings you back to Sleepy Hollow?

EDDIE WALTON

I'd rather not talk about it.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Sure, sure. Maybe I could prise the answer out of you while I give you the tour. What's changed and all that?

EDDIE WALTON

You can certainly try. We could make it an evening thing. I've got to get settled first.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Sounds like a plan. Come on, car's this way.

*Yvette exits, car keys in hand. Eddie turns and walks through the door into his hotel room. Lights down on the airport and lights up on the hotel room as Eddie walks through the door.*

Scene 2 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*The interview begins playing again. While the interview plays, Eddie unpacks his things. Roland tries to get Eddie's attention.*

JANE FRASNON

Tell me a bit about Barthes and his inspiration on the book.

EDDIE WALTON

Barthes' most influential piece of writing was his essay 'La mort de l'auteur' or, as we would know it, 'Death of the Author'. In it, he argues that the

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EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

author only matters in the process of creating the work. Once it's written, it's the audience's job to take it and run with it.

*The interview fades again.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Stop ignoring me, Eddie.

EDDIE WALTON

You mean before at the airport? What was I supposed to do? 'Oh, hi, Yvette. I was just talking to the ghost of Roland Barthes, dead French philosopher, who only I can see.' I'd rather not have people think I've lost my mind.

ROLAND BARTHES

But you have lost your mind, Eddie. Why else would I be here?

EDDIE WALTON

To torment me. I quoted you in my book and ever since you've been haunting me. Now, go away, would you? I have to make a phone call.

*Roland begrudgingly exits. Eddie grabs the hotel phone and the White Pages and begins dialling. The phone rings.*

JESSICA SWIFT

(voice mail)

Hi, you've reached Jess and Beth. Leave a message after the tone and we'll get back to you.

*The tone sounds.*

EDDIE WALTON

Jess, it's Eddie. I know you got my previous messages. Yvette told me. Answer the phone would you? I want to talk about the lawsuit. When you get this, call me. I'm at the Mercure.

*Eddie hangs up.*

*He looks through the phone book and finds another person to call. The phone rings. Roland re-enters, dressed in pyjamas and holding Ferdinand, his teddy bear. The phone is answered.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Doug, it's Eddie. Yes, Eddie Walton. I ... He- Hello?

*The sound of a dead phone line plays. Eddie slams down the phone.*

(CONTINUED)

ROLAND BARTHES  
*Père?*

EDDIE WALTON  
Yeah. Jess', not mine.

*Eddie hunts through the phone book. Finds another name and grabs the phone again. He dials. Roland sits in a chair, seating Ferdinand across from him in another chair, and begins writing in his notebook again. On the screen, words appear:*

*Roland's List*

*People Eddie has called:*

*(The list continues down the screen as he writes)*

*'Jess', 'Yvette', 'Jess again', 'Room service', 'Jess again', 'Jess' father, Doug', 'Jess' mother, Diana'.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)  
Di, Hi, it's Eddie. Eddie Walton.

*The line goes dead again. He hangs up. Roland sighs and stops writing.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)  
No one close to Jess will even speak to me. Except Yvette.

ROLAND BARTHES  
Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that you cheated on Jessica, and then caught a plane to New York, wrote a book that got you really famous, a book which just so happened to contain thinly-veiled versions of the people you knew from back home, subjecting everyone back home to the scrutinising eye of the audience. Have I forgotten anything?

EDDIE WALTON  
That about covers it. You did forget to mention that *all that* was around fifteen years ago. I figured there'd be a statute of limitations on feelings.

ROLAND BARTHES  
You don't know people very well, do you?

*There is a knock at the door.*

ROLAND BARTHES (cont'd)  
*Service de Chambre?*

*Eddie opens the door. In walks Yvette.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
You ready to go?

EDDIE WALTON  
Just about.

*Eddie grabs a jumper and throws it on. Eddie and Yvette exit into the street, which lights up.*

ROLAND BARTHES  
Don't do anything stupid.

*Lights down on the hotel room.*

Scene 3 - Street

*Eddie and Yvette walk and talk.*

EDDIE WALTON  
So, where are we going? Clubbing?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
Clubbing? Eddie, we're in our mid-thirties, not our mid-twenties. We're too old for clubbing.

EDDIE WALTON  
(curious)  
Where are we going then?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
There are a couple places we could try. There's the Piano Bar on Little Malop, or Beav's further down.

EDDIE WALTON  
Jeez, you leave for a decade and a half and everything changes.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
That's the way Geelong is going. "A city trying to find its identity in the 21st century". An identity that doesn't just make it a second-rate Melbourne.

EDDIE WALTON  
What about the Nash? That's still around, yeah?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
It's undergoing renovations. It was looking awfully sad for a while.

EDDIE WALTON  
(casually)  
Right, Beav's it is.

*Lights go down on the street.*

Scene 4 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*The interview begins playing again. Lights up on the hotel room. Barthes' is reading a book.*

JANE FRASNON

Speaking of the audience reading too much into it ...

*Eddie chuckles knowingly. He's heard this question before.*

JANE FRASNON (cont'd)

Miller Road. Lots of people think your first book was about your life back home.

*As the interview plays, Eddie and Yvette burst into the hotel room, kissing passionately. They fall onto the bed. Yvette and Eddie throw off their jackets.*

EDDIE WALTON

Of course they would. Romance books invite speculation. Freddie finds himself torn between stable Tessa and live-wire Yvonne. Would-be biographers dug into my past hunting for a torrid love affair and they found it. You'd think they'd uncovered the Rosetta stone when they found out that the two women I loved before I left home were Jessica and Yvette.

*The interview fades again. Eddie stops Yvette before they go any further. Roland takes one look at Eddie and Yvette, takes Ferdinand, covers his eyes, and exits.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Wait, should we be doing this?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Of course. I'm single, you're single. What's the problem? You are single, right?

EDDIE WALTON

Well, yeah. It just feels like falling into old habits.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Eddie, it's fine. Stop overthinking it.

EDDIE WALTON

Yeah, you're right. I am overthinking it.

*They continue kissing and fumbling at each other's clothes. The answering machine beeps and begins playing a message.*

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JESSICA SWIFT

(on message)

Eddie, it's Jess. You want to talk? Let's talk. You might not like what I have to say though.

*Eddie lunges for the phone and puts it to his ear.*

EDDIE WALTON

(nervously put-out)

Eddie. Eddie Walton. This is Eddie Walton.

*Yvette sits on the bed, rather put-out.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Yeah, let's talk. Tomorrow. Come around the hotel room. Let's settle this like adults.

*He hangs up.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Sorry Yvette, really important phone call.

*She stares daggers into him. She begins collecting her jacket and re-composing herself.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

(hurt)

No, I get it, totally. You came back here to go running back to Jess. How could I think any differently? Never mind that Jess has a girlfriend now.

EDDIE WALTON

Look, it's not about romance with me and Jess. She's suing me, over Miller Road. She claims it got her fired.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Yeah. It did. She was working at one of those fuddy-duddy religious private schools, and your book got into the wrong hands.

*Lights down on the hotel room.*

Scene 5 - Principal's Office (St Joseph James of the Holy Spirit)

*Lights up on the Principal's Office. Principal BENJAMIN TODD, full of pomp and procedure, is sitting at his desk. JESSICA, head held high, enters.*

BENJAMIN TODD

Jess, thanks for coming so promptly.

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JESSICA SWIFT

What's this about Ben?

*Ben pulls out a book from his desk. He shows it to her. Miller Road.*

JESSICA SWIFT (cont'd)

Didn't think the work of Eddie Walton was your cup of tea?

BENJAMIN TODD

It's not. Far too salacious for my blood.

JESSICA SWIFT

Why do you have it, then?

BENJAMIN TODD

You dated Eddie Walton before he wrote this one, yes?

JESSICA SWIFT

Get to the point, Ben.

BENJAMIN TODD

Tessa. Jessica. Your ex-boyfriend isn't exactly Shakespeare, is he?

JESSICA SWIFT

Not exactly. So?

BENJAMIN TODD

Look, some things have come to light. One of the teachers raised this with me.

JESSICA SWIFT

Raised what with you?

BENJAMIN TODD

Jess, we've made our stance on same-sex relationships very clear. You signed a contract stated that you would live a Christian life while you worked here. This book claims you're a bisexual.

*He pronounces bisexual like it's a foreign curse word, his mouth can't quite grapple with the word.*

JESSICA SWIFT

Oh for Christ's sake!

BENJAMIN TODD

(haughty, then calm)

Do not take the Lord's name in vain! Please.

JESSICA SWIFT

Tessa is not Jessica. Eddie wrote a book and grabbed a handful of ideas from his life and spiced them up on the page. So, just because our names sound alike

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JESSICA SWIFT (cont'd)

and we both dated artist types that makes us the same person? And so what? It's ancient bloody history.

BENJAMIN TODD

The thing is ...

JESSICA SWIFT

(incredulous)

You're going to fire me over this?

BENJAMIN TODD

I'm sorry. It's out of my hands now. Controversy means losing students and you know what that means for our finances. Parents expect us to maintain certain standards. They expect us to avoid ... well, you know ... *modern agendas*.

JESSICA SWIFT

Oh my god, you're actually firing me. Fine, fire me. But be prepared to be sued up the wazoo. You and Eddie both.

*Jess storms out. Lights out on the Principal's Office.*

Scene 6 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*Lights up on Eddie's Hotel Room. Eddie and Yvette are sitting on the bed. Yvette has put her jacket back on.*

EDDIE WALTON

Why was Jess working in a place like that anyway?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

They pay well those places. You know, teachers don't earn much but some of those private schools pay a pretty penny. She and Beth were saving to adopt.

EDDIE WALTON

Adopt?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Yeah. Jess wants a family, Eddie. Did you think you'd define her life forever? She's been with her girlfriend Beth for about five years now.

*She sighs and pats Eddie on the knee.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

Anyway, I think we've discussed your ex-girlfriend enough. I'm going to head home.

*She gets up and heads to the door. As she's leaving, she pauses in the doorway.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

Eddie, this whole thing with Jess. Just move on.

*Yvette exits. Blackout on the hotel room.*

*Lights up on Eddie, writing at his desk. Roland is reading a book.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Eddie?

EDDIE WALTON

Ssh. I'm writing.

ROLAND BARTHES

You're attempting to write.

EDDIE WALTON

Quiet.

*The two sit in silence while Eddie tries to write. Roland begins fiddling and making annoying sounds to fill the silence. Eddie shuts his laptop.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Why am I haunted by you, you frumpy French phantom?

ROLAND BARTHES

You're the one who summoned me. You tell me.

EDDIE WALTON

It's because I quoted you, isn't it?

ROLAND BARTHES

Try again.

EDDIE WALTON

I don't know.

ROLAND BARTHES

Think, Eddie. Why would the dead philosopher haunt the dead author?

EDDIE WALTON

It's about Miller Road, isn't it? This whole thing is about Miller Road, isn't it?

*There is a knock at the door. Eddie checks his watch.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Don't answer that. Don't speak. That's probably Jess.

*Eddie approaches the door and opens it. Jess walks through the open door, arms firmly crossed.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Thanks for coming, Jess.

JESSICA SWIFT

I almost didn't. So, you're back?

EDDIE WALTON

Yeah. I am.

JESSICA SWIFT

Harassing my parents part of your return plan was it?

EDDIE WALTON

I wasn't harassing them. I just thought they might pass a message along for me.

JESSICA SWIFT

You're lucky that Dad has cooled down since you wrote Miller Road. He considered catching a plane to New York to break your jaw when you published it.

EDDIE WALTON

(looking at Roland)

I guess there *is* a statute of limitations on feelings.

*He turns to Jess.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Anyway, come have a seat.

*Eddie shows Jess the available seat. She crosses and sits down. Eddie follows. Eddie sits across from Jess.*

JESSICA SWIFT

So, how long do you plan on staying?

EDDIE WALTON

As long as it takes to resolve this without lawyers.

JESSICA SWIFT

Weren't you in the middle of a press junket? Won't your agent get pissed the longer you're back here?

EDDIE WALTON

Maybe. Who cares. Right now, this part of my life is more important.

JESSICA SWIFT

Why? You haven't been back in fifteen years. Why do you give a damn about anyone in this town?

EDDIE WALTON

I give a damn about you. I give a damn about the people I hurt to get to where I am.

JESSICA SWIFT

Then why come back now and not sooner? You either care or you don't. Not coming back sends a pretty clear message about where you stand.

EDDIE WALTON

You sent for me, Jess. With this lawsuit. It got things bubbling in me. Made me think. I felt guilty. You always knew how to get to the heart of me.

JESSICA SWIFT

(jokingly)

Oh god, you're not still in love with me, are you?

*Eddie is silent.*

JESSICA SWIFT (cont'd)

Oh god, you're still in love with me.

EDDIE WALTON

No... Maybe... I don't know. I was with you the longest of anyone. Until I screwed it up.

JESSICA SWIFT

Yeah Eddie, you screwed it up. You screwed it up big time. Cheating on with me with Yvette and then skipping town. That's kind of burning the bridge between us. What did you think would happen when you came back? That I would be dutifully waiting for you? That I would take you back after you apologised? I'm happy with Beth.

EDDIE WALTON

Part of me hoped you were still single. That we could find some common ground. That we could find each other again.

JESSICA SWIFT

Why don't you curl up with Yvette instead? She's been in love with you longer than I have.

EDDIE WALTON

What?

JESSICA SWIFT

Surely you must have known. Yvette was in love with since she was sixteen. You pounced on that opportunity the moment you had a chance. Things were getting serious so you freaked and went to play patty cake with Yvette. Then you left. That fucks up a person, Eddie. I've tried to convince her that you're bad news, but god damn it if we don't love the things that are bad for us.

EDDIE WALTON

Guess I've got more to fix than just what I've written.

JESSICA SWIFT

I don't know if this is something you can fix, Eddie.

ROLAND BARTHES

You have a really messed-up relationship with your muses, Eddie.

*Blackout on the hotel room.*

Scene 7 - Coffee Place

*Lights up on a coffee place. Eddie and Yvette are sitting across from each other.*

EDDIE WALTON

Yeah, the meeting with Jess didn't end well.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

So you called me? To tell me about how Jess told you that I still love you after you confessed to her that you maybe, might have feelings for her.

EDDIE WALTON

That's about right, yeah.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You're lucky that dating shitty guys has given me a high ceiling for emotional bullshit.

EDDIE WALTON

Was what Jess said about you true? Do you still have a thing for me?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Eddie, we've already embarrassed ourselves by almost jumping into bed after a couple of drinks. Let's not go any further than that.

EDDIE WALTON

Speaking of embarrassing ourselves, Miller Road.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

What about it?

EDDIE WALTON

You haven't asked about it. Everybody wants to talk about that book, but not you.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

What's there to talk about? It's fiction, right?

(pause)

Right?

EDDIE WALTON

Of course. The characters are funnier than I am in reality. They're wittier. They always have the perfect metaphor to explain their complicated lives.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

What about the plot?

EDDIE WALTON

You have read it, right?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

I've got to be honest Eddie. I don't read most of your stuff. Just not my style.

EDDIE WALTON

Well, as long as we're being honest. Miller Road is kind of half-fact, half-fiction. Things were moved around. Everything in the book takes place over about three months when you and I know that things were more glacial slow, over the course of the year.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Where do you start the book then? With your Mum's death?

EDDIE WALTON

Kind of. The prologue is a fictionalised version of her death. A piece of historical revisionism to give me some closure. Bloody selfish on my part.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Suppose it's a lot of power. Writers write, they define the story. Something that was used for the purposes of embellishment becomes the actual story. Crystallised into the past like dead Christians in the Coliseum.

EDDIE WALTON

I can't help that. I'm just trying to make a living doing the only thing I'm good at.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

It's not because it's the only thing you're good at. You enjoy writing. The world needs plenty of people who are skilled with the English language who don't stick their lurid half-truths into airport lounges. You can't keep using economic necessity as a shield. Responsibility is part of it. You like what you do and you like why you do it. We all made our capitulations to survive as adults. Burning the past with a half-truth was your capitulation.

*Lights down on the coffee shop.*

Scene 8 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*Eddie taps away at his laptop. He finishes a sentence triumphantly, reads it, hates it and erases it. Roland is snoring loudly. Eddie attempts a rewrite and struggles to write. He rises from his chair.*

EDDIE WALTON

Damn this artistic constipation!

*He kicks one of the hotel room walls. Roland sits up suddenly.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Something troubling you Eddie?

EDDIE WALTON

Is something troubling me? Of course something's troubling me. Everything's troubling me. That's why I can't write. A thousand tiny cuts are diverting my attention. You, Yvette, Jess, this whole damn town.

ROLAND BARTHES

Your father, who you still haven't seen.

EDDIE WALTON

My relationship with my father has never caused me this grief before. This is all tied up with that book. Why do you care about my father anyway? Familial shit was always Freud's wheelhouse. Why isn't he haunting me?

ROLAND BARTHES

Freud has a lot of motherfuckers to haunt. Don't forget though Eddie. We 20th-century philosophers are all the intellectual children of Freud. Through psychoanalytical theory and Freud's student Carl Jung. Some of us may be moreso children of Saussure than Freud but the cigar chomper had his influence.

EDDIE WALTON

Yeah, well, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

ROLAND BARTHES

Ceci n'est pas seulement une cigar.

*There is a knock on the door.*

ROLAND BARTHES (cont'd)

You expecting someone?

EDDIE WALTON

No, were you?

ROLAND BARTHES

Why would I be expecting someone? Je suis un putain de fantôme.

*There is another knock at the door.*

JESSICA SWIFT

Eddie, it's Jess. I'm ready to talk again if you are.

ROLAND BARTHES

Well, Eddie, I thought we were really close to a breakthrough on that one but unfortunately, your hour is up.

*Eddie heads to the door and lets Jess in.*

Scene 9 - Coffee Place

*Lights up on a coffee place. Yvette is sitting at a table, sipping a latte. Yvette's phone rings. She looks at who is calling. She places it on the table and lets it ring out. Her voicemail plays.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You've called Yvette Baudelaire. What's the scoop?

*A voice comes from the other line.*

ADAM

Hi, Yvette, it's Adam. I haven't heard from you since our date last week. Call me back when you get this.

*Jess exits the hotel room and sits down at the table, listening to the end of the voicemail. The message ends with a long beep.*

JESSICA SWIFT

Was that the Adam guy you were dating?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

One date. We went on one date. He wouldn't shut up about his ex. Dating sucks.

JESSICA SWIFT

Yeah. Anyway, sorry I'm late. Traffic.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

All good. Rumour has it you went to see Eddie last night?

JESSICA SWIFT

Yeah, but ... I don't know. It didn't feel like we resolved anything. We talked for a bit. I asked my questions, I got answers. Nothing felt fixed.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

That's Eddie for you. You get your answer on why he was back?

JESSICA SWIFT

He says guilt, I think he's trying to reconnect with something. I just wish I knew what to do with him.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Maybe a story will help? It's the only thing these writers understand.

JESSICA SWIFT

(chuckling slightly)

A story? Are you going to write it for me?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

I could do. My editor would kill for some gossip on the prodigal son of Geelong returning home. At least entertain the idea.

JESSICA SWIFT

I'm entertaining it. An interview wouldn't be that hard.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Exactly, and it's a compelling public interest story.

*Yvette begins pitching the idea.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

"Homegrown Author Writes Educator Out of Job". Addy readers love the local angle.

*Lights down on the coffee place.*

Scene 10 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*Lights up on Eddie's Hotel Room. Eddie is fervently packing. He is on his phone. Roland is toying with the idea of lighting a cigarette (checking smoke alarms and such).*

EDDIE WALTON

Don't worry Bianca, I'm on the next flight back. Whatever I was searching for, it isn't here. Love. Redemption. This place is a dead end. Culturally and emotionally.

*After some deliberation, Roland attempts to light his cigarette only for his cigarette lighter to have no flame. Roland attempts to get Eddie's attention. Eddie puts the phone to his shoulder to talk with Roland.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Lighter?

EDDIE WALTON

(irritated)

You know I don't smoke.

*Eddie returns to his phone call.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Yeah, I'm still here. Why on earth would I have seen the front page of the Geelong Advertiser? Fax? This is 2016, not 1986. Just email me the link.

*Eddie goes to his laptop and taps a few keys. He does a quick scan. Roland flops on a chair, dejected.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Damn it. Yeah, I read it. I've got a few calls to make.

*Eddie hangs up. Eddie dials another number and lets it ring.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Yvette, we need to talk.

*Eddie hangs up.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

Roland? Can I ask you a question?

ROLAND BARTHES

(off-handedly)

*Oui, oui.*

EDDIE WALTON

You appeared when I got handed Jess' lawsuit.

ROLAND BARTHES

(slightly interested)

*C'est vrai.*

EDDIE WALTON

For the first time, I regretted something I wrote.

ROLAND BARTHES

(deadpan)

*Et viola.*

EDDIE WALTON

Are you my conscience?

*Roland perks up.*

ROLAND BARTHES

I suppose, or something to that effect. You probably manifested me to make you feel better about your work. Hoping to find solace in a comforting quote from the only work of mine you bothered to read.

EDDIE WALTON

Death of the Author and all that.

*As Barthes monologues, he closes in on Eddie like a cat cornering a mouse.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Exactly. You wanted me to appear as a magic genie and grant your wish by quoting myself. Hopefully, I would pull out the line that "linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I am no more than the man who says I". Forgetting that the same work contains lines such as "The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book: the book and the author take their places of their own accord on the same line". You thought you could close the book on Roland Barthes. Well, guess what?

*Roland grabs Eddie by the jacket and pulls him in close.*

ROLAND BARTHES (cont'd)

You can't kill Roland Barthes, Eddie. Because I'm always alive ...

*He gestures to Eddie's brain. Eddie is petrified.*

ROLAND BARTHES (cont'd)

... in here.

*There is a knock at the door. Eddie goes to answer it. He stands in the doorway.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You ok, Eddie? You look like you've seen a ghost.

EDDIE WALTON

I'm fine, Yvette. It's just dawning on me that I need to stop writing about real people.

ROLAND BARTHES

Ask her if she has a lighter.

EDDIE WALTON

Do you have a lighter, Yvette?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Sure.

*She pulls out her lighter. Eddie grabs, flicks it open, and holds it out for Roland. Roland puts his cigarette to the lighter. Eddie closes the lighter and hands it back. Yvette is bewildered by Eddie's actions.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

You didn't just call me here for a lighter, did you?

*Roland exits, his cigarette successfully lit.*

EDDIE WALTON

No, I ... your article.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You have a problem with me writing for the local paper?

EDDIE WALTON

I have a problem with what you wrote, yes.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

You could fight it in court, but unlike you I've guarded myself by being factually accurate.

EDDIE WALTON

You've written bloody yellow journalism is what you've done.

*Yvette laughs.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Yellow journalism? You're accusing me of being 'fake news'? If what I wrote is yellow journalism, then Miller Road is blood red. You wrote Miller Road about Jess. I offered her a retort. My only interest in you was as a person, not as an author. Even before you were famous, Jess had an eye for your writing more than for you as a person. I guess I thought things would change when you came back but you still only have eyes for Jess, and it's hard not to feel a little hurt by that. Maybe I waited too long for you to love me back.

EDDIE WALTON

Yeah, well, god damn it if we don't love the things that are bad for us. I guess I should see this court case out. For closure, you know.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

I think that would be best. Then you can leave again.

*Lights down on Eddie's Hotel Room.*

Scene 11 - Court House Foyer

*Lights up on the foyer of a Court House. Roland enters wearing a judge's wig, a judge's robe, and holding a gavel. He begins wandering around and gently tapping the gavel on various surfaces to test the sound. Jess enters the scene. Eddie emerges from the door. He turns to see Jess.*

EDDIE WALTON

Jess. I was hoping I'd catch you beforehand.

JESSICA SWIFT

If you've got something to say, you can direct it to my lawyer.

*Roland bangs the gavel. Eddie jumps. Jess doesn't.*

EDDIE WALTON

I just wanted to talk to you about Yvette.

JESSICA SWIFT

What about Yvette?

*Roland bangs the gavel. Same reaction.*

EDDIE WALTON

We spoke last night at my hotel room. I guess she just clarified some things for me.

JESSICA SWIFT

Like what?

EDDIE WALTON

Like the fact that I've always been chasing you. Trying to recapture the past.

*Roland bangs the gavel. More violent reaction. Eddie shoots Roland a look.*

JESSICA SWIFT

Haunting you, is it?

*Roland bangs the gavel loud enough to break Eddie's concentration. He snaps. He strides towards Roland and grabs the gavel and raises it over his head, ready to strike Roland.*

EDDIE WALTON

I'm not haunted by the past. I'm haunted by the bloody ghost of Roland Barthes!

*Jess chuckles. Eddie softens.*

JESSICA SWIFT

You? Eddie? Haunted by the ghost of Roland Barthes? Eddie, you're an airport novelist. Cheap and dense. What business would Roland Barthes have with you?

*Eddie moves away from Roland, gavel in hand.*

EDDIE WALTON

Why not me? Roland wrote all about how authors should remain dead in the eyes of the audience. I wrote myself into every inch of those airport novels. I had to resurrect myself before the audience as if to shout 'I am the Author, and I'm alive, goddamnit'!

JESSICA SWIFT

So, putting your personal past to the torch was all to prove something to a French intellectual who died before you were even born?

EDDIE WALTON

Maybe. On the other hand, maybe it was never specifically about Roland. Maybe Roland was just the vessel that I poured all my inadequacies and regrets into.

JESSICA SWIFT

In other words, you're haunted by your past.

EDDIE WALTON

I guess you're right. But aren't all writers? That's what Barthes was trying to say, yeah. As a writer, you're just the conduit for all the culture that came before. Combined and expelled in a new form. Maybe that's what Barthes meant when he said that "the text is a tissue of citation, resulting from the thousand sources of culture". To be a writer is to be obsessed with the past and transform it into the future. I guess all of us who write are haunted in our particular ways. Writers are haunted by the past, journalists are haunted by the present, and philosophers are haunted by the future.

JESSICA SWIFT

So, what does that mean for you as a person?

EDDIE WALTON

I don't know. Am I going to stop using the people in my life as inspiration for my work? Probably not. That would betray the writer in me.

*He puts the gavel down.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

(thinking it through)

But, at the same time, I can't keep using people like that. No one wants to get close to someone who could betray them in writing. Plenty of people can write about this dual identity, but nobody has any tips when you're living it. All I ever heard was 'you can write anything you want so long as you cover yourself legally'. Doesn't exactly account for feelings.

*Pause. Then, an idea spreads across Eddie's face.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

I think I have the solution. I have to make a phone call.

*Eddie steps to the edge of the stage. Jess leans against a wall as he makes his phone call.*

EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

(on phone)

Hi, Bianca. I quit. I'm quitting writing. I'll come back, finish the press junket, but after that, I'm out. Tell the press 'this is Eddie Walton's last book'.

*He hangs up and turns to Jess.*

JESSICA SWIFT

How long do you reckon your retirement will last?

EDDIE WALTON

At a guess, fifteen years.

JESSICA SWIFT

So what about this court case?

EDDIE WALTON

Let's do this. I need to face the consequences at some point.

*They exit together into the courtroom. Roland crosses the stage and enters Eddie's Hotel Room.*

Scene 12 - Eddie's Hotel Room

*Lights up on Eddie's Hotel Room. Roland struts across the hotel room and hangs up his robe and wig on the coat rack. Eddie enters the hotel room and finalises his packing. He places his laptop on top of his luggage and zips it up.*

ROLAND BARTHES

You know, for a second there I thought you might actually kill me.

EDDIE WALTON

You're already dead, Roland.

ROLAND BARTHES

Oh yeah.

*There is a knock at the door. Eddie approaches the door as if he knows who it will be. He opens the door and lets Yvette in. Roland sees Yvette and pulls out his smoke. Eddie sighs.*

EDDIE WALTON

You still have your lighter, Yvette?

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Sure.

*She pulls out the lighter and holds it out. Eddie reaches for it and Yvette pulls back.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE (cont'd)

First, tell me why you need it.

*Eddie looks over at Roland.*

EDDIE WALTON

Fine. The ghosts in this hotel keep bugging me about their cigarettes.

*She chuckles and hands over the lighter. Eddie holds out the lit lighter for Roland who lights his cigarette.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Wait, are you serious?

EDDIE WALTON

Maybe.

*He hands the lighter back. Yvette notices the packed bag.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

So, you're leaving? Again?

EDDIE WALTON

For a little bit. I'm heading back to finish the press tour and then ...

*He shrugs.*

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

And then?

EDDIE WALTON

I don't know. Writing is all I've ever known. First published at twenty-two and I haven't stopped until yesterday. For once in my life, there's no plan. No grand structure in front of me. Honestly, it's kind of terrifying.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Then why did you quit?

EDDIE WALTON

It felt like the only way to fix things. Writing Miller Road was my great sin. Quitting writing felt like a worthy sacrifice to make things right. To show that it wasn't the only thing I cared about.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE

Was it the only thing you ever cared about?

EDDIE WALTON

You want to know if I ever felt the same way about you as you did about me.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
Well, did you?

EDDIE WALTON  
Do you want the honest answer or the easy lie? One of those I'm quite good at.

YVETTE BAUDELAIRE  
No more lies.

EDDIE WALTON  
Well then, the honest answer is maybe. Maybe I did. Feelings are confusing, Yvette. Especially for someone who formed their closest bonds at twenty. Do what you want with that information. I've got a plane to catch.

*Eddie grabs his belongings and exits the Hotel Room. Roland follows him. The lights slowly fade on Yvette, alone in the hotel room.*

Scene 13 - Avalon Airport

*Lights up on Avalon Airport. Eddie and Roland are sitting on an airport bench, Eddie's luggage between them*

ROLAND BARTHES  
Do you think you'll come back?

EDDIE WALTON  
Of course, yesterday's court case with Jess was just the first step of many. Court cases, long and messy things.

ROLAND BARTHES  
You could just send a lawyer down here instead.

EDDIE WALTON  
I know what you're getting at. I thought about just hopping on the plane and never returning but the truth is that I didn't need much convincing to come back. I could've sent lawyers the first time, but I came of my own volition. I think I have unfinished business with this town. For better or worse, Geelong shaped me. Just as Cherbourg shaped you. We wouldn't be the people we were if not for our small town origins.

ROLAND BARTHES  
It's a double-edged sword though.

EDDIE WALTON  
I mean yeah. Something about being stuck at the bottom of the world filled me with wonder at those big cities. Melbourne was home to the artists. Sydney was the holiday house of the movie stars. When I was

(MORE)

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EDDIE WALTON (cont'd)

young, I thought that nothing had ever really come out of Geelong and that I'd be the first success story. Of course, Guy Pearce had me beat by a few years when I did start to make a name for myself.

ROLAND BARTHES

Perhaps that's why you chose New York. As opposed to LA as Melbourne is to Sydney.

EDDIE WALTON

Perhaps. Or maybe I just had stars in my eyes. New York. Centre of the universe.

ROLAND BARTHES

Fame. A slippery beast. You told Jess that I was the one who wanted to make you shout that you were the author. Perhaps this town created that impulse in you. The impulse to be noticed.

EDDIE WALTON

Put the fire in my belly to never get stuck here. And in trying to launch myself into the stratosphere, I burned some people along the way. But I guess it didn't matter because my fame could wallpaper over that.

ROLAND BARTHES

So what changed?

EDDIE WALTON

Fame was incredibly lonely. So I came back to the last genuine connections I made. Back home.

*The sound of a plane flying overhead roar and then fade.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Well, Eddie, time for me to leave.

*Roland stands and begins to exit.*

EDDIE WALTON

Hey Roland, if you're ever in the area, feel free to haunt me again.

*Roland tuts.*

ROLAND BARTHES

Eddie, have you learned nothing? I'm in here, remember?

*He puts a finger to Eddie's head. He slowly saunters away.*

ANNOUNCER

Flight JQ606 is now ready for boarding.

*The lights fade and the screen fades in. The interview returns.*

JANE FRASNON

The two women you loved back home? Only women you've ever loved?

EDDIE WALTON

You could probably say that. Hard to have sustained relationships when everyone knows you're a writer. They're all worried that I'll write them into a book.

JANE FRASNON

Would you?

EDDIE WALTON

I might. Look, when writing, you draw from life. People think the adage 'Write What You Know' is all about situations. It's not. It's more about characters you know, dialogue you know, feelings you know. Those are the things you take from those around you.

JANE FRASNON

Is there a cost to that?

EDDIE WALTON

Absolutely. But a writer has to be ruthless. Sometimes the creation of the work is more important than the people around you.

JANE FRASNON

Sounds lonely.

EDDIE WALTON

You get used to it. Writing is my first love, everything else comes second.

*The interview fades. Black out.*

End