

THE SUBSTITUTE PSYCHOLOGIST

by Edith Weiss

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THE SUBSTITUTE PSYCHOLOGIST*A Comedic Trio***by Edith Weiss**

SYNOPSIS: When the school psychologist, Ms. Kempers, is unavailable for some online counseling sessions, her student assistant, Eric, tries to counsel and guide the students, with humorous and better than expected results.

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: Eric is at school (office or a background of books), all others are at home.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(2 females, 1 male, 1 either)*

- ERIC (m/f) Teenager, student assistant to Ms. Kempers, the school's guidance counselor and English teacher. Eager, positive, good guy trying to seem professional. *(32 lines)*
- LIZ (f) Teenager with a tough exterior, but suffering from an inferiority complex because of her younger sister. *(34 lines)*
- IMOGEN (f) Teenager, a tough exterior, with an interior to match. Doesn't care what other people think, doesn't suffer fools gladly. Very smart and hard working. *(27 lines)*
- RANDY (m) Teenager. A really good football player, but in danger of flunking out and getting kicked off the team. Very excitable and energetic. *(14 lines)*

SET: Actors are at different areas to represent their different Zoom locations.

PROPS

- psychology books (ERIC)
- glasses optional (ERIC)
- something to fidget with—jewelry, or a pencil, or the like (LIZ)
- copy of *A Tale Of Two Cities* (RANDY)
- short, much used pencil (IMOGEN)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This was written to be performed on Zoom. It's about the characters, teenagers who normally interact only with their own cliques. By the end, they have all connected with someone in a way they never did before. And each has a moment: Imogen asking for her long gone pencil back, Eric getting Liz to talk to him, Randy realizing Imogen is not saying he's stupid but that he's an athlete, Liz realizing her writing is a talent that is all hers.

AT START: ERIC is on Zoom. He very ostentatiously places psychology books around him so the other participants can see them. Maybe he has glasses he can take on and off for emphasis. LIZ appears on the screen.

LIZ: Hi. I'm Liz. I'm on the list for the meeting with Ms. Kempers.

ERIC: Hi Liz. I'm Eric. We're in the same creative writing class.

LIZ: Really?

ERIC: You never noticed me?

LIZ: Uh—no. Should I have?

ERIC: Maybe. I sit like two desks behind you.

LIZ: Why would I look behind me? Hey, where's Ms. Kempers? Isn't she the host of this meeting?

ERIC: She had a family emergency. So I'm taking over. As you probably don't know or even care, I've been her assistant for two years.

LIZ: Great.

ERIC: I've had like two psychology courses. So maybe you want to talk to me?

LIZ: You're a teenage boy. How could you possibly help me with my problems?

ERIC: I could listen, I could—

IMOGEN appears on the screen.

IMOGEN: Hey. Imogen here.

ERIC: Welcome. I'm Eric, I guess you could call me the substitute psychologist.

IMOGEN: I need to talk to Ms. Kempers.

LIZ: So do I. And she's not here today.

IMOGEN: You're Liz, right?

LIZ: Yeah. Do I know you?

IMOGEN: I doubt it. Even though I sit one seat away from you in Art class.

LIZ: You do? Oh. I guess I just never saw you.

IMOGEN: You borrowed a pencil from me once.

LIZ: Did I?

IMOGEN: Yeah. And never returned it. It was my favorite pencil.

LIZ: (*Insincere.*) I'm sorry.

IMOGEN: It's okay. It's fine.

LIZ: Okay. So as I was—

IMOGEN: It was yellow. With an eraser on top?

LIZ: Most pencils look like that, don't they?

IMOGEN: It was from NASA. From when I took a trip there. It said so on the side. NASA.

LIZ: Wow. I really am sorry. I had no idea. You should have said something.

IMOGEN: Yeah, I should have. It's my fault.

ERIC: I think there's some fault to be shared here.

LIZ: Stop it, Eric. I did not come here for a group therapy session about a pencil from NASA.

ERIC: Of course not. But you do seem depressed.

LIZ: I'm fine.

ERIC: The fidgeting? The listlessness? That doesn't seem fine to me.

LIZ: I am not listless! Whatever that means.

IMOGEN: It means lacking energy or enthusiasm.

ERIC: I can see something is bothering you. Why not talk to me? I might even understand things Ms. Kempers wouldn't, because we're in the same peer group.

LIZ: Talk to you? Instead of Ms. Kempers?

ERIC: If you want. I mean, it's up to you. But I can see something is on your mind, weighing you down.

LIZ: I've been holding this in for years. I can wait until Ms. Kempers gets back.

ERIC: Okay. But you could explode, you know.

LIZ: Excuse me? I could explode?

IMOGEN: It's just a figure of speech.

RANDY appears on the screen.

RANDY: Where's Ms. Kempers? I have to talk to her right now, about an assignment.

IMOGEN: Oh, you have her for English?

RANDY: Yeah I do.

IMOGEN: She's great, isn't she? I have her too, second period. I mean she's hard, but she's a great teacher.

RANDY: No! Not great! Too hard. Too hard to be great!

IMOGEN: I think that challenging students is what makes a great teacher.

RANDY: I have a book report due tomorrow! I thought I would just skim it, like I always do, but look at this! (*Holds up A TALE OF TWO CITIES.*) All these words! One right after another, packed so close together, tiny print! Too many words!

IMOGEN: Sorry it doesn't have pictures like when we were in elementary school.

RANDY: You're kind of mean, aren't you?

IMOGEN: No I'm not. She gave that assignment six weeks ago.

RANDY: I know. I picked this book cause I heard it had beheadings in it. I thought it would be like "Game of Thrones". And then the title—"Tale of Two Cities". Just two cities, I thought. How long could it be? Listen to this—(*Reading.*) "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." What does that even mean? Make up your mind!

ERIC: Sorry to disturb your rant, but Ms. Kempers is not available, and we're actually having a meeting here.

RANDY: Just tell her I need an extension. Please. I can't flunk this class. They'll kick me out of football. Please. My name is Randy McDermott. I need an extension.

IMOGEN: Or a calendar.

ERIC: Randy McDermott. Whoa. I've seen you play. You're great. I'll see what I can do.

IMOGEN: I have a suggestion.

RANDY: (*Mocking.*) What? That I drop out of sports so I can be a better student?

IMOGEN: No, I doubt that would make you a better student.

RANDY: You are so mean!

IMOGEN: No, honest, that's not how I meant it. I've seen you play. You're an athlete. You're so good, and quitting football would make you miserable. Which wouldn't help your grades.

RANDY: Okay.

IMOGEN: So—I'm here to ask Ms. Kempers for more students to tutor. I need the money and I'm smart. Eric, why don't you set me up as Randy's tutor?

ERIC: I'm not sure I can do that.

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