

# Inheritance

A One Act Play  
by Jess Mason

Playwright's note: This play is a work of fiction. The characters, situations, and conversations in this play have been imagined and/or exaggerated for dramatic effect by the playwright.

However, the character of Esther is lovingly based on beloved Esther McCune, who left our world in January 2022. Special thanks to Karen McCune Barca, Lynn McCune, and Janice McCune.

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**Characters:**

MOM: Adult Female presenting

LACEY: Young Female/Non-binary in their 20s

ESTHER: Senior Adult Female presenting

**Props:**

Living Room Furniture

Envelopes

Large Box

Scarf x 2

Lobster Bib

Lobster Mallet

Rubber-banded Playbill Stack

Cottage Cheese Container

Ice Cream Container

Stack of Books

Recital Program

Mosaic Art Piece

**Playwright's Note:**

The inclusion of Esther's appearance in the scene is up to the discretion of the director. A projector might be used to show that Esther is not physically present in the scene. Similarly, blocking and lighting may be used to otherwise separate Esther from Lacey's present-time living room.

**Scene:**

a small modern living room set up. Armchair, side table, lamp, small houseplant. There should be various clutter strewn about such as takeout containers and discarded cosmetics. The clutter shouldn't be distracting, and shouldn't indicate any signs of wealth or success. Just the lived in look of a single girl in her mid twenties.

**Act One**

*(Knock on door. LACEY enters and opens it).* LACEY: Mom! What are you doing here?

MOM: *(Carrying a large cardboard box. Steps aside LACEY and enters without being invited in).* Hey Lace! I can't stay for long. I grabbed your mail. One of them says "Final Notice". *(drops envelopes on the side table and continues to inspect around the apartment)*

LACEY: We talked about the mail, Mom.

MOM: I just stopped by to give you this, and, you know, see if you need anything else. (*Drops the box in the middle of the living room floor, and starts looking around. Wanders off stage to the kitchen*). Sweetie, you don't have anything in the fridge! I wish you would have called me: I would have stopped at the store on my way over and brought you some things.

LACEY: (*Yelling offstage*). Well, Mom, that's hard to do when you drop by with no warning.

MOM: Are you OK? There's no food in this apartment.

LACEY: I'm fine, Mom. I get plenty to eat. Soup kitchen at the church down the street every Tuesday.

MOM: (*Gasp*) Lacey Anne!

LACEY: Kidding, Mom! (*under her breath*) Sorta.

MOM: Oh, you!

LACEY: Mom, you can't just drop in without calling or texting me first. What if I wasn't home?

MOM: Well, where else are you going to be? It seems like the only *friends* you see these days are those other girls you're competing with for parts.

LACEY: MOTHER!

MOM: (*chuckles and shrugs it off*) Oh, I'm just teasing you. The truth is, I'm WORRIED about you. Honey, you've been through three jobs in only five months!

LACEY: Duffy's closed. The rent got too high, and Eric couldn't afford to run the coffee shop anymore. I didn't get fired this time: I got laid off.

MOM: You're twenty-five! You need health insurance and benefits. These here, there, and everywhere jobs aren't enough to support you.

LACEY: I had a call back on Thursday night for *Chicago*.

MOM: Really? Oh, honey! That's wonderful! Does it pay?

LACEY: Community theater, Mom.

MOM: *(Huge sigh)* Sweetheart. I love that you keep putting yourself out there. But it's just not paying the bills. *(pause)* Have you given more thought about going back to school? You could finish your English degree! I hear they are desperate for teachers, and I think you'd be so good. .

LACEY: Can we talk about this another time? I thought you said you had to run. *(gestures to the box in the middle of the floor)*. What is this, by the way?

MOM: Well, that's for you. Karen called last week.

LACEY: Karen?

MOM: Esther's daughter, honey. Don't you remember?

LACEY: I don't think I've ever met her.

MOM: Sure you have. Anyway, the lawyer was reading Esther's will to Karen, Lynn, and Janice, and apparently, Esther left you this.

LACEY: *(stunned for a minute)*. Me?

MOM: Yes, you.

LACEY: Well . . . what is it? Are you sure it was for me? Why wouldn't she leave it for one of her own grandkids?

MOM: Esther always had a soft spot for you, you know. Always asked about you and your auditions when she called.

LACEY: I don't know that.

MOM: Well. Now you do, and now this *(gestures to the box)* is yours. And take this *(fishes an envelope out of her purse)*.

LACEY: What is this?

MOM: Just a little something to get you by.

LACEY: *(Looks in the envelope)* Two hundred dollars? MOM. *(Tries to give the envelope back)*

MOM: *(refuses)* Stop being prideful, Lacey Anne. Take the money and say thank you to your loving mother.

LACEY: Thank you loving mother.

MOM: I love you. I do have to get going. But please, call me when you find out about that play.

LACEY: *(walks her to the door)* I will. I promise. PLEASE call next time?

MOM: I'll do my best! *(exits)*

LACEY: *(Begins opening her mail, discarding the letters on the coffee table as she opens them, causing more clutter).* Ugh. Let's see what great news the universe has for me today. *(Holds up two envelopes)* Electric bill . . . *(opens the electric bill).* Ooof. Cable bill? *(opens the cable bill)* Even worse. *(sighs)* *(opens the next envelope)* I will ABSOLUTELY NOT be donating to Hartford University. Haven't even finished paying for my undergrad yet.

*(sees the fourth envelope, and gets excited)* Oh, please, please, PLEASE! *(opens the envelope, and reads aloud)* "Dear Miss Woodrick, Our board of directors met last week regarding the community arts grant. We regret to inform you we have decided to decline your application at this time. . . ." *(Lacey crumples the letter and throws it.)* DAMNIT! *(More cries of frustration, which ends in her kicking the box in the middle of the floor.)*

*Kicking the box seems to jolt her back to her senses. She drags the box over to the chair and sits down.*

LACEY: Esther, all of this is for me? *(beat)* Why?

*(She opens the box. On top is a flowing, translucent scarf. LACEY holds the scarf up to her face and breathes in deeply).*

LACEY: Peonies. It still smells like you, Esther. I remember all the ladies in the Glastonbury Gang had her own signature scent. Nancy always wore rose water, you always wore perfume that smelled like peonies, and Grandma always smelled like *(sniffs the scarf again)*

LACEY & ESTHER (whose voice we only hear through the projector/offstage): Lavender.

*(Lacey drops the scarf into her lap, and reaches into the box again. She pulls out a lobster bib and a mallet.)*

LACEY: Of course! These are from the annual

LACEY & ESTHER: Lobster picnic! (*This time, a faraway form of Esther becomes visible onstage, either through lighting or a projector. Lacey does not see or hear Esther as she starts to make her way into the conversation. Lacey is unaware that her monologue has turned into a dialogue of sorts.*)

LACEY: I never realized how bougie having a backyard picnic with a dozen lobsters served on paper plates was until we did that Childhood Memory exercise in Drama 101.

ESTHER: Well, it was cheaper than going out to a fancy seafood restaurant. You could order them in bulk from the grocer's or Atlantic Seafood Company.

LACEY: Papa and Bill would get these huge steampots going on the grill out back.

ESTHER: We ladies were usually inside preparing the potato salad, the cornbread, the steamers, the desserts . . .

LACEY: Then they would WHACK the lobsters on the heads with these mallets before throwing them into the pot.

ESTHER: Except your grandmother. Pat would open up a bag of chips and call that cooking.

LACEY: Susie and David and I always got stuck on corn shucking duty in the backyard while Papa and Bill were cooking the lobsters.

ESTHER: Kept you kids busy and out of the kitchen.

LACEY: The last lobster picnic I went to was at your house.

ESTHER: I made sure we could go see the play afterwards.

LACEY: I don't remember the inside of your house. I remember the garden. We all ate off of our laps in the garden. I dream about having a barely tamed English Garden like yours one day.

ESTHER: Thank you, darling. When we moved back to Connecticut I wanted to take a piece of Lewisburg back with me. I had the most beautiful garden when Robert was teaching at Bucknell.

LACEY: Just the kind of garden

LACEY & ESTHER: You could get lost in

LACEY: With a good book, and a cup of tea.

ESTHER: Or a bottle of wine.

LACEY: *(takes out a huge rubber banded stack of Playbills.)* Oh my God! Glastonbury Community Summer Theater! There must be 20 years of show programs here. *(starts looking through the programs)*

ESTHER: As soon as they posted the dates for the annual summer show, I'd call Pat, and she'd call your mother. I'd say "make sure that Lacey girl gets to come see the show with us!"

LACEY: *The King and I. Anything Goes. You're A Good Man Charlie Brown.*

ESTHER: You'd sit and watch, this teeny tiny little girl, and your eyes would just get bigger and bigger, they almost took up your whole face. You'd almost beam with this ethereal light. I knew right then and there. You'd been bit by the bug.

LACEY: I wouldn't have majored in theater if it weren't for these summer shows. *(places the playbills on the coffee table)*

ESTHER: I didn't want you to forget. It's a rare thing to be able to sit with a person as they realize their life's gift.

LACEY: Well, now I'm slogging off to audition after audition after audition. If someone had the good sense to put me in some dance classes when I was little, maybe I'd get cast more.

ESTHER: Plenty of actresses get by without a kick-ball-change *(Esther performs the dance move)*.

LACEY: You'd always insist on getting ice cream at McDonald's after every show, no matter how late it was.

ESTHER: You can always count on McDonald's to be open when you need it.

LACEY: Even though McDonald's ice cream sucks.

ESTHER: PARDON ME?

LACEY: There are only two choices, chocolate and vanilla.

ESTHER: So what? Not everything has to be complicated and Instagram worthy stacked to the ceiling with 57 different ingredients like hot chilis and donuts and bacon. I lived on this Earth a very long time, and you know that I loved a good razzle dazzle. But sometimes the best things are the simplest things.

LACEY: Well, I'd take a plain vanilla McDonald's cone over the whole lot of nothing I've got going on in my freezer right now.

ESTHER: I agree. Ice cream would be nice.

LACEY: What's next? *(takes the next item out of the box)*. A program for *(reads)* the Bucknell Symphony Orchestra, featuring Esther McCune, Coloratura Soprano?

ESTHER: Oh sure, doll. When Robert was teaching Physics at Bucknell I studied opera. Didn't I ever tell you that?

LACEY: "Je Veux Vivre" from *Romeo et Juliette*.

ESTHER: Love that song! Such drama.

LACEY: "Ou va la Jeune Hindoue" by Lakme.

ESTHER: Boring.

LACEY: "Ariettes Oubliées" by Debussy.

ESTHER: So tragic. He loved that girl.

LACEY: "Glitter and Be Gay" from *Candide*.

ESTHER: Well, you've got to have a little Bernstein.

LACEY: "Someone to Watch Over Me" by Gershwin. *(LACEY's phone pings with a notification. She is temporarily distracted from checking out items in the box)*.

ESTHER: Yes, Dr. Katin fought me on those last two. I'll never forget when he stormed into my recital rehearsal. You see, my voice teacher and I had submitted my set list to the music secretary without getting his prior approval. He blustered and thundered all about the stage. *(Esther*

*deepens her voice, mimicking him*) “This orchestra has a history of prestige!” and “we must preserve the tradition of this fine department!”. *(laughs)* By the end, he was so riled up that he roared “this is not a damn rock and roll concert!”

But I stood my ground. There had been such a buzz of excitement in the rehearsal space that day. We were having FUN. Dr. Katin was outnumbered. And my God, when I got my way and I closed my recital on my terms, we damn near brought the house down.

LACEY: *(Throughout this monologue, LACEY from the news on her phone)* They passed on me for Chicago.

ESTHER: Oh, that is a shame.

LACEY: I’m not even in the ensemble.

ESTHER: I’m so sorry.

LACEY: I thought . . . I didn’t think my audition was that bad. They gave me a call back . . .

ESTHER: Maybe this just wasn’t the right fit for you right now.

LACEY: . . . . What am I supposed to do now? Other than spend my empty afternoon looking through this box? *(Reaches in for the next item. Pulls out a stack of books, and a paper on top).*  
Syllabus: Mrs. McCune’s Senior English Lit. *(Looks through the book choices)*

ESTHER: I’m proud to say that most of those books would be banned in Florida nowadays.

LACEY: Mom wants me to give up the dream of being an actress, go back to school, and become a teacher.

ESTHER: I loved my English classes. I so enjoyed hearing the thoughts of young people as I expanded their literary horizons.

LACEY: Maybe I SHOULD just give up already. But I don’t want to be a teacher. All of my friends who are teachers are miserable and looking for a way out.

ESTHER: I suppose times are different. Too much pressure to perform well on a test, not enough space to explore one’s true passions.

LACEY: (*agitated pacing*) Plus, how could I possibly inspire students the way you did? “Hey kids! Someday, you’re going to follow your dreams and major in the arts in college. But then you’ll never get hired for a paid acting gig so you’ll have to live in the smallest, dingiest apartment this city has to offer.” (*as the rant continues, LACEY starts to take out her anger on her apartment, such as kicking her furniture, throwing pillows, etc.*)

ESTHER: Lacey Girl.

LACEY: “And, you’ll have so much student loan debt the only furniture you can afford is your cousin Tony’s ugly, busted couch!” (*kicks the couch*)

ESTHER: Oh please.

LACEY: “Oh, and here’s a tip, kids: restaurants LOVE when their waitresses keep asking off to go to auditions. You get lots of lectures about how NO ONE WANTS TO WORK ANYMORE.” (*crushes some sort of debris on the coffee table*).

ESTHER: This is ridiculous.

LACEY: “Plus, you’ll be so exhausted by the end of your shift at your shit job you come home every night and collapse.” (*throws a throw pillow*)

ESTHER: You’re behaving like a child.

LACEY: “SO when you DO make it to an audition, you’re SO TIRED that maybe your voice cracks on the high notes or you trip over your feet during choreography and then you can’t even get cast in the freaking COMMUNITY THEATER ENSEMBLE!” (*LACEY swipes all the items off the coffee table. This includes a beverage, which spills all over the floor and on the Playbills LACEY has just opened.*)

ESTHER: **ENOUGH!** (*At this point, the fourth wall has fractured. Although LACEY still does not know that ESTHER has been watching, ESTHER’s “enough” echos through the stage.*)

LACEY: Oh, shit! (*LACEY grabs for the nearest absorbent item, Esther’s scarf, and sinks to her knees to dry off the floor and her Playbills.*) Ok . . . enough.

ESTHER: That’s a good girl. No more nonsense.

LACEY: My mom is right. I need to get serious. I need to grow up.

ESTHER: Well, what do YOU want to do?

LACEY: I just . . . want to BE in the theater. It's the one place where, even though the rest of my life is a shitshow, I feel inspired. And alive. And happy.

ESTHER: Having a place is a good start. A theater has many important roles both on stage and off that need dedicated and smart people to fill them.

LACEY: *(plays with the scarf)* Esther, you did so many different things in your life. . . you just made it look so easy.

ESTHER: Trust me. It was never easy.

LACEY: *(reaches into the box and pulls out the final piece. It is wrapped in another of ESTHER's scarves, and LACEY puts the scarf on herself as she unwraps the gift.)* A mosaic?

ESTHER: I found that at an art festival in Hartford when I was just about your age. It was right after I took a leap of faith and moved away from my parents in Rhode Island.

LACEY: What's this label on the back?

ESTHER: I put that there. It was good to know it was always there.

LACEY: "One should make one's life a mosaic. Let the general design be good, the colors lively, and the materials diversified."

ESTHER: Marthe Bibesco.

LACEY: Huh. *(Surveys the spread of gifts from the box)* You certainly made your life a mosaic.

ESTHER: I did.

LACEY: And I never met anyone whose colors were more lively.

ESTHER: Thank you dear.

LACEY: So . . .

ESTHER: So?

LACEY: Maybe . . .

ESTHER: Yes . . .

LACEY: I don't have to be just one thing?

ESTHER: We contain multitudes. Let all the parts of you shine brilliantly.

*(Lights down)*