

CHAPTER ONE



ONCE, IN A HOUSE ON EGYPT STREET, there lived a rabbit who was made almost entirely of china. He had china arms and china legs, china paws and a china head, a china torso and a china nose. His arms and legs were jointed and joined by wire so that his china elbows and china knees could be bent, giving him much freedom of movement.

His ears were made of real rabbit fur, and beneath the fur, there were strong, bendable wires, which allowed the ears to be arranged into poses that reflected the rabbit's mood—jaunty, tired, full of ennui. His tail, too, was made of real rabbit fur and was fluffy and soft and well shaped.

The rabbit's name was Edward Tulane, and he was tall. He measured almost three feet from the tip of his ears to the tip of his feet; his eyes were painted a penetrating and intelligent blue.

In all, Edward Tulane felt himself to be an exceptional specimen. Only his whiskers gave him pause. They were long and elegant (as they should be), but they were of uncertain origin. Edward felt quite strongly that they were not the whiskers of a rabbit. Whom the whiskers had belonged to initially—what unsavory animal—was a question that Edward could not bear to consider for too long. And so he did not. He preferred, as a rule, not to think unpleasant thoughts.

Edward's mistress was a ten-year-old, dark-haired girl named Abilene Tulane, who thought almost as highly of Edward as Edward thought of himself. Each morning after she dressed herself for school, Abilene dressed Edward.

The china rabbit was in possession of an extraordinary wardrobe composed of handmade silk suits, custom shoes fashioned from the finest leather and designed specifically for his rabbit feet, and a wide array of hats equipped with holes so that they could easily fit over Edward's large and expressive ears. Each pair of well-cut pants had a small pocket for Edward's gold pocket watch. Abilene wound this watch for him each morning.

"Now, Edward," she said to him after she was done winding the watch, "when the big hand is on the twelve and the little hand is on the three, I will come home to you."

She placed Edward on a chair in the dining room and positioned the chair so that Edward was looking out the window and could see the path that led up to the Tulane front door. Abilene balanced the watch on his left leg. She kissed the tips of his ears, and then she left and Edward spent

the day staring out at Egypt Street, listening to the tick of his watch and waiting.

Of all the seasons of the year, the rabbit most preferred winter, for the sun set early then and the dining-room windows became dark and Edward could see his own reflection in the glass. And what a reflection it was! What an elegant figure he cut! Edward never ceased to be amazed at his own fineness.

In the evening, Edward sat at the dining-room table with the other members of the Tulane family: Abilene; her mother and father; and Abilene's grandmother, who was called Pellegrina. True, Edward's ears barely cleared the tabletop, and true also, he spent the duration of the meal staring straight ahead at nothing but the bright and blinding white of the tablecloth. But he was there, a rabbit at the table.

Abilene's parents found it charming that Abilene considered Edward real, and that she sometimes requested that a

phrase or story be repeated because Edward had not heard it.

“Papa,” Abilene would say, “I’m afraid that Edward didn’t catch that last bit.”

Abilene’s father would then turn in the direction of Edward’s ears and speak slowly, repeating what he had just said for the benefit of the china rabbit. Edward pretended, out of courtesy to Abilene, to listen. But, in truth, he was not very interested in what people had to say. And also, he did not care for Abilene’s parents and their condescending manner toward him. All adults, in fact, condescended to him.

Only Abilene’s grandmother spoke to him as Abilene did, as one equal to another. Pellegrina was very old. She had a large, sharp nose and bright, black eyes that shone like dark stars. It was Pellegrina who was responsible for Edward’s existence. It was she who had commissioned his making, she who had ordered his silk suits and his pocket watch, his jaunty hats and his bendable ears, his fine leather shoes and his jointed

arms and legs, all from a master craftsman in her native France. It was Pellegrina who had given him as a gift to Abilene on her seventh birthday.

And it was Pellegrina who came each night to tuck Abilene into her bed and Edward into his.

“Will you tell us a story, Pellegrina?” Abilene asked her grandmother each night.

“Not tonight, lady,” said Pellegrina.

“When?” asked Abilene. “What night?”

“Soon,” said Pellegrina. “Soon there will be a story.”

And then she turned off the light, and Edward and Abilene lay in the dark of the bedroom.

“I love you, Edward,” Abilene said each night after Pellegrina had left. She said those words and then she waited, almost as if she expected Edward to say something in return.

Edward said nothing. He said nothing because, of course, he could not speak. He lay in his small bed next to

Abilene's large one. He stared up at the ceiling and listened to the sound of her breath entering and leaving her body, knowing that soon she would be asleep. Because Edward's eyes were painted on and he could not close them, he was always awake.

Sometimes, if Abilene put him into his bed on his side instead of on his back, he could see through the cracks in the curtains and out into the dark night. On clear nights, the stars shone, and their pinprick light comforted Edward in a way that he could not quite understand. Often, he stared at the stars all night until the dark finally gave way to dawn.