

Michael Fagnani

DEAR EDWARD

From the Desk Of

Richard Heston

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Dear Edward,

Imagine my surprise when I saw your name in the headlines today. Despite your illustrious career, the world has seemed urgent to forget you, but not me, never me. I suppose it helps that you always seemed to have a distaste for fame, no matter how much of it you attracted. Ah, but here I am, wasting ink while I dwell on the past. Well, I'll try not to open old wounds. It's really quite the opposite of why I've decided to write to you today. The fact of the matter is, I opened my copy of the Times today and there you were, front and center: "EDWARD MONTGOMERY, STORIED HOLLYWOOD PRODUCER, DIES."

You know, they really did pick a great photo of you to go with the headline. I'm looking at it now. Your hair is slicked back, like always, and even in newsprint your eyes still have that sparkle to them that I remember so well. Oh God, how I remember those eyes. And that night in Paris, when we walked along the Seine, do you remember? Perhaps not now. We'd been shooting *An American Holiday*, and even though you knew I'd been through an exhausting

day of filming (one can only pretend to enjoy kissing Annie Daniels so much) you still knocked on my door and we went out. How lovely France felt, so open, so unlike the States. No one knew who we were, just two anonymous figures along the water, free from the judgement of prying eyes. But of course, life moves on, and that film did change everything. You nabbed the Oscar, and me the nomination, and I think that's where my love for you began to be poisoned by jealousy.

You always had this knack for the industry. What scripts would make the best pictures, which directors could bring your vision to life, which actors could portray what you wanted. I won't say that I'm not flattered that in nearly all of your productions, you found a place for me. Small parts, bit parts really, then speaking roles, and suddenly I was the leading man with awards buzz, and you're the one who catapulted me there. But I was always behind you. You had all the awards, all the fame, before I was even a speck of interest to the press. And even after I won for *The Man About Town*, I couldn't look past how that night also yielded you your third golden statuette. How could your star shine brighter than mine when I was the one acting in the damn things, baring my feelings on the screen? Meanwhile, you gathered your fame out of an office on the Starlight Pictures lot.

How cruel I was to you on the night of our last meeting. I knew it was cruel even then, yet I couldn't stop myself from unleashing those razor-sharp words that eviscerated us. I knew the press knew about you. Somehow it had gotten out, and I was scared that the scandal would bring me down with you. The jealous part of me saw it as an opportunity,

to finally rise above your shining star, now sure to diminish with the next day's headline.

And to think that in our last moments together I lied to you. Though I suspected you saw through me, even then, like you always could. But you pretended to believe the flimsy excuse that I threw at your feet, that my career mattered more than our love. I was wrong. I was afraid, afraid that if the world knew about us, about me, then all my hard work would be down the drain. Afraid that if we only had each other, would it be enough? It should've been. I knew that was all you wanted, to love and to be loved by someone. Even twenty years later, I still picture the look of hurt in your eyes, their sparkle extinguished, as I turned and ran from you like a frightened child. I should've protected you, protected us. I loved you so fiercely, and yet I fled from you in what I deluded myself into believing was an act of self-preservation. We should've gone down together, damn it all to the press. At least if our names were both mud, we'd have been in the dirt together. And that's all that should've mattered, not the fame, not the fortune. Us.

And now it's too late. The years have passed without so much as a phone call. I'm ashamed to admit how many times I considered picking up the phone, only to retreat once more. I was selfish, and now you've gone forever to a place I cannot reach you. My dearest Edward, I'm sorry. I'm sorry my desire for fame and my fear of being known tore apart our love, and I'm sorry I never tried to repair it when I could. I suppose that's why I'm writing you, though I know you'll never be able to read it. My confession is going to the press. They're sure to put it in big block letters, I can see it now: "RICHARD HESTON LOVED EDWARD

MONTGOMERY." I was afraid then, but I am no longer. I hope that accounts for something.

With all the love I can muster,

Richard Heston