

THE CUP

Rosie, mid-thirties, has taken her precious family treasure to the “Antiques Assembly,” a TV show that travels from town to town bringing several famous appraisers to assess the quality of the items local folks bring to the event. Rosie finally arrives at the front of the line. She will be speaking with the famous, English-born Eric Silver, thirties, who works at Sotheby’s in New York. Eric, sick of his job, is in a rush to weed through the hordes of people with worthless and uninteresting items.

CHARACTERS

Rosie: mid-30s

Eric: 30s, an appraiser of antiques

SETTING

“Antiques Assembly” event and TV show

TIME

The present

ROSIE: Oh my God, my name’s Rosie Blugoski, I can’t believe I’m actually here on the “Antiques Assembly.” I’m in incredible shock! *(She lets out a little squeal.)*

ERIC: So is my entire nervous system at the moment.

ROSIE: I’ve seen you on the show as the “expert” appraiser so many times. It’s incredibly bizarre that I’m actually, actually talking to *you*.

ERIC: I find it equally disconcerting I assure you. *(Reaching out his hand.)* Eric Silver.

ROSIE: *(Wiping down her hand.)* Oh boy. I get sweaty when I’m a bit nervous and excited. *(She shakes his hand.)*

ERIC: Yes. *(Wiping the sweat off his hand.)*

ROSIE: Ah gee, Eric, I love your accent. It’s even more amazing in person. I just feel like my head is going to pop off.

ERIC: Oh, now don’t you worry, dear, that might be an improvement. *(He laughs.)*

ROSIE: *(Laughs.)* Oh my God, that is so funny. I didn’t know you had a sense of humor, Eric.

ERIC: Neither did I. I didn’t realize I was joking. Now, hate to be all rushy even if I do have several screaming hordes of people behind you, but what little treasure do we have to show me today?

ROSIE: *(Laughs.)* Eric Silver — I always think that is so cute!

ERIC: Cute? Well, indeed, I’ve been called many things in my life — many, many things — but cute is generally not one of them. Thankfully.

ROSE: Well, I mean that you’re an appraiser and your name’s Silver. It’s cute ’cause you could appraise silver. And then your name is Silver. See?

ERIC: Right. *(Beat.)* Anyway, I’m certain it took all of your creative juices to cook that up but let’s conserve your energy for the displaying of your little . . . whatever.

ROSIE: *(Looking stiff suddenly and gesturing.)* Oooh. Is that the camera there?

ERIC: Yes, but the public has no worry as yet. We aren’t filming at the moment.

ROSIE: Why not?

ERIC: Well, they only take footage of the rare and rather fascinating. And we are neither. Once we take a look at the item, we determine if it’s worthy of a pitch. Which is why I’m encouraging taking a look at your item, any time now, or at any moment that feel you can possibly pull that gem out. If it is then determined to be of interest, then we film. It generally ends up being only about three percent of the people we see throughout the day. So please don’t be too disappointed if it’s not you because there’s a ninety-seven percent chance, and perhaps even higher in your case, that it won’t be. So hoorah, and on we go.

ROSIE: *(Beat.)* Well, that’s cheating isn’t it?

ERIC: *(Getting irritated.)* Cheating?

ROSIE: Well, it gives you a false perspective of things when you're at home watching. It makes you think like everybody who comes has something rare and fascinating rather than the fact that most of them are just lugging around a bunch of junk that you weed out.

ERIC: *(Beat.)* Well . . . true. And that very thought — people lugging junk here for me to weed through — torments my very soul as well. I assure you. However, *(Seriously.)* you don't grow a garden with weeds, do you, Ms. Ellis?

ROSIE: *(Pause, thinking.)* Oh my God! But all those poor people in line. Some had to bring their thing from miles and miles and miles and —

ERIC: I get the point. How awful for them.

ROSIE: And they won't make it on TV. When they find out how useless their family heirloom is, they'll be so, so sad.

ERIC: *(Falsely sympathetic.)* Oh, now, dear, no use feeling sorry for them, that could be *you*.

ROSIE: Oh no! My item is rare, and it's been in the family for years and years and —

ERIC: Quite.

ROSIE: Sorry. I just don't want those people who are so looking forward to this to realize they just have junk.

ERIC: Well, now, many could have a family piece of memorabilia that they love and cherish and only want to know more about. They don't really care if it's worth anything.

ROSIE: Really? Does that happen often?

ERIC: No, are you mad? They're looking for cold, hard cash. But anyway, I think a good majority of people have something slightly above junk.

ROSIE: Yeah, well, you weren't back there in line. *(Quietly.)* There was a guy back there with a table. It was so funny looking. Totally had these legs that were crooked.

ERIC: It had cabriole legs?

ROSIE: No, crooked legs. Bowlegs.

ERIC: Yes, I understand, assuming you are talking about the

table rather than the man. They are cabriole legs. Cabriole is the Italian word meaning "goat's leap."

ROSIE: Well, I don't know if the legs looked goatish. More like a bowlegged, midget, football player.

ERIC: Well, exactly. That's the Italians for you — very fu-fu and poetic. However, I don't imagine they have a poetic phrase for bowlegged midget football players — fortunately — so cabriole it is. It's an eighteenth-century style that brushed aside the straight William-and-Mary style.

ROSIE: Well, I don't care if the maker was straight or gay — the table was ugly. Don't tell that guy though, 'cause he seems very violent, you know what I'm saying?

ERIC: Well, ugly has nothing to do with worth, my dear. My aunt Eleanor is as ugly as a bulldog eating a wasp, but she's still worth several million. Besides, you don't understand. Cabriole legs are the signature of the Queen Anne style that swept the European salons.

ROSIE: Oh, OK. Well fine. I just thought a crooked-legged table was really the signature of one that wobbles so that you have to put sugar packs underneath it to keep it steady, but maybe I'm wrong, OK?! 'Cause I don't work at Southbees like you do. Anyway, it doesn't matter at this point because he threw it across the room and it broke.

ERIC: Sotheby's. Sotheby's, my dear. Why did he throw the Queen Anne table across the room may I ask?

ROSIE: I don't know. I might have offended him by calling his table bowlegged. It hit the lady with the tulip-shaped lamp.

ERIC: Oh dear. Tulip-shaped? *(She nods.)* Oh God, it was probably a Tiffany.

ROSIE: No, her name was Melanie, but boy, was she pissed. You know, if you people sold some hot dogs or something in that line, Melanie's lamp would have never gotten broken. It's probably a blood-sugar thing.

ERIC: Ms. Ellis, I understand your confusion with the show's policy on filming and hot dogs, and I apologize for the rather unruly line experience, that you apparently caused, but if

you don't take out this item of yours, I'm going to have to do something I really, really rather not do.

ROSIE: What?

ERIC: (*Furious.*) Talk to you further!

ROSIE: Oh, you're funny. Fine. I was just building suspense.

ERIC: Yes, no wonder I feel in the midst of a horror film.

ROSIE: (*Puts it on the table.*) OK. Dah-da-da-dah! (*Sighs.*) There it is.

ERIC: Yes. (*Frozen. Looks at it hard from several sides.*) Well . . .

ROSIE: Now you understand, don't you?

ERIC: Oh, indeed . . . I'm beginning to . . . truly understand more about the table-throwing incident.

ROSIE: Pretty impressive. It's something, right?

ERIC: Well, it certainly is *something*.

ROSIE: Do you want to know a little more about it?

ERIC: Honestly? I . . .

ROSIE: It's a cup.

ERIC: (*Beat.*) Yes, this much I gathered. Fascinating.

ROSIE: It was my great, great aunt's originally who died.

ERIC: How tragic. She drank from it no doubt?

ROSIE: She received it from her grandfather who received it from his grandfather who fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill, which is a very famous battle fought in 1775 in Charlestown. Over hills. One of them being *Bunker Hill*.

ERIC: (*Acting surprised.*) Nooooo? And then they must have named it after the hill?

ROSIE: Really? You know the battle then?

ERIC: Vaguely. My degree from Oxford in American history seems *not* to have been a total waste after all.

ROSIE: So you can see the cup firstly has historical significance.

ERIC: In what way?

ROSIE: I told you. It was owned by my great, great aunt's grandfather's grandfather who fought in that battle.

ERIC: And is it connected to the battle in anyway?

ROSIE: Yes, there are several scratches and a dent in it that I'm

told came from a bullet that almost hit my great, great aunt's grandfather's grandfather. The cup saved his life.

ERIC: How unfortunate. That it dented the cup of course. But the problem, my dear lady, is that these dents and scratches could be caused by someone dropping it in the mud several times, throwing it against someone's face, slamming a sledgehammer over its base, and running it over with a bus several times. One does not know that it has any connection to any battle, and particularly the Battle of Bunker Hill. Additionally, it does not appear to be that old. It *could* be because, in fact, tin is old, though worth almost nothing. But after careful examination for signatures, there is nothing to date it back to the seventeen hundreds or any battle at all.

ROSIE: But it is from that battle!

ERIC: Yes, that may be! Sorry. But with no proof, in the eyes of dealers, it is not. It is quite simply, a cup, with several unsightly dents and a rather brownish encrust . . . ment.

ROSIE: But Vincent Van Gogh drank out of it?

ERIC: Really? Perhaps this now explains why he went mad.

ROSIE: Are you being sarcastic with me?

ERIC: Oh no, Ms. Ellis. I'm simply saying it seems to be a bit . . . well . . . diseased. It also has an odd odor.

ROSIE: Well, I didn't want to ruin its patina. You always talk about ruining the patina if you clean it.

ERIC: Well, that's correct, that's absolutely correct in most cases, but in this case, the idea of ruining it is impossible, I'm afraid.

ROSIE: It's that good, huh?

ERIC: Let's just politely say again that ruining it is impossible.

ROSIE: I think the interest level increases for it with the Vincent Van Gogh connection.

ERIC: And how is it, my dear little irritant, that we would know that?

ROSIE: I was hoping you'd ask that!

ERIC: Oh jolly!

ROSIE: Because he painted it on his bedside table in the very

famous painting *Vincent's Bedroom at Arles*. My great, great aunt was in Southern France in 1891 and met Van Gogh there, who she just called Go — He let her. Isn't that cute?

ERIC: Disgustingly so.

ROSIE: She let him borrow the cup for a full week.

ERIC: Oh, well, that is quite astounding! I had no idea! Now that you say that . . . well, that is something to behold!

ROSIE: See?! I told you!

ERIC: Yes, and this explains the little need to sanitize the cup. But one wonders how "Go" managed to paint it into the painting since that particular painting was completed in 1889, nearly a year before your great, great aunt's visit to France. In addition, and this is just a tiny bit more troublesome in the scheme of things, Van Gogh was . . . well, how do I put this politely . . . dead, at the time.

ROSIE: (*Beat.*) Dead? When my great, great aunt visited? Dead?

ERIC: Dead. Deceased. Departed. Defunct. Gone! Like I wish I were at this moment.

ROSIE: Oh God. Well, maybe I got the date wrong then?

ERIC: Oh, I'm afraid it's a bit more drastic than that.

ROSIE: What are you saying? That I'm lying?!

ERIC: No, no, dear, it's much more pathetic than that. I think you believe every word you've said. Your great, great aunt however is a lying cow. How much did she sell it to you for?

ROSIE: It's a family keepsake. We've passed it down. A value could not be placed upon it.

ERIC: Uh-huh. How much?

ROSIE: Five hundred dollars. (*Tearful.*) She said it was worth millions!

ERIC: Oh, dear, dear. Well, in the garden of life several poisonous flowers grow that choke the life out of the rest of us. Your aunt is your poisonous flower. You and people like you are mine.

ROSIE: I will be choking you for real in a second! I will!

ERIC: No need to bark. I believe you.

ROSIE: It must be worth something. At the least, it's very old.

You're supposed to give me an estimate! Where's my estimate?! I didn't stand in this godforsaken line since five AM in the morning for nothing, you snotty, prudish-faced, rotten meany!

ERIC: Ohhhh. Rudeness. I would think modestly it would be able to fetch . . . uh fifty cents to a dollar.

ROSIE: (*Screaming.*) What?!!

ERIC: I was being conservative! It could be a dollar fifty!

ROSIE: I can't believe this!

ERIC: Neither can I, my dear child. Neither can I!!

ROSIE: But only last week you talked to some stupid lady with this vile-looking bandoleer bag, you know that pouch, that was worth \$40,000 dollars!

ERIC: I know, it was vile, but it was glass-beaded and it was Indian. Indian items are quite rare since everyone . . . well . . . killed them.

ROSIE: And the lady with the stupid fancy soap dish she paid fifty cents for?

ERIC: Yes, a bleeding bowl from the eighteenth century. Used to drain the veins of the unwell.

ROSIE: That's disgusting! Why would someone want a bowl some sick person bled in in the eighteenth century?

ERIC: That's a very good question. But why would someone want a Little Orphan Annie dress or Elvis Presley's undergarments or a table with bowlegged legs much like a midget football player for that matter? The answer is simply . . . because they do! Do you know that brat with the bleeding bowl didn't even give me a cut of her auction earnings? Well! Anyway, it was nice meeting you and your . . . cup. It's time to shove off. Ta, ta.

ROSIE: This experience was awful for me. I hate this show! I'll never watch it again!

ERIC: Oh my, what a threat to our ratings.

ROSIE: I don't like you a bit. I'm just going to put my cup away in my silly ceramic box (*She starts putting the cup away in the box.*) from China and take it home and bring it to a

much more caring appraiser who will run proper testing that will prove it was in the Battle of Bunker Hill and painted by Go!

ERIC: Well, that's just — *(He notices the box.)* Wait, hold on, now. Let's not be too hasty. Where did you say you got that box?

ROSIE: Oh some great, great, great somebody in my family when he went to China in the sixteen hundreds. It's just a stupid old box that it fits in. I thought you wanted me to shove on? Now you want to look at my box?

ERIC: Oh my good God. Do you know what this is? That looks like the classic red-and-blue design from the Ming Dyna . . . *(Covering his excitement.)* No. Wrong. It's just a peasant box I'm sure. Very unsightly.

ROSIE: Is it worth something?

ERIC: No, no, no, don't be ridiculous. It's nothing. Very unpleasant actually. When was this person there again?

ROSIE: Sixteen hundreds, I think. But maybe that's a lie to you too. Why are you staring at it?

ERIC: Staring, no, I'm not staring. I'm simply watching you put away that lovely cup and thinking more and more about how interesting it is. It has the royal trinity: rarity, provenance, and beauty. It grows on you. Do you think maybe I could buy the whole kit and caboodle, cup and box, from you for a handsome . . . oh, four thousand?

ROSIE: *(Pause.)* Wait. But you said . . . and you told me . . . No. This is a precious family treasure that we have loved and cherished and passed down to each other throughout the years. We simply could not give it up for any reason. We wanted to find out a little more of its history and understand its worth. And then we will put it in a prized place in the hearth of our home, holding onto the history of those family members before us, so that we will pass down their strength and courage to my children and my children's children.

ERIC: Four thousand five hundred.

ROSIE: Sold!

ERIC: Oh, my dear, Ms. Ellis, how lovely it has been to meet you!

ROSIE: And you too, Mr. Silver. I'm glad you came around to the truth about my cup.
(He writes the check. She turns to the audience. Mumbling quietly.)

ROSIE: I knew he'd fall for the box. It's a great imitation. Works like a charm every time.

ERIC: What did you say?

ROSIE: I said it's worth quite a bit — every dime. You know, I was thinking about what you said about the garden of life. Many gardens do have poisonous plants, Mr. Silver, but you know what saves the lovely delicate flowers. Fertilizer. Lots and lots of cow dung. Well, have a great day!