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Spring 2018

## The age of innocence

Nina Morrison  
*University of Iowa*

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THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

by

Nina Morrison

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Theatre Arts in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Nina Morrison

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Theatre Arts at the May 2018 graduation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began writing this play in a workshop given by playwright and novelist Kia Corthron. I was challenged to address race in this play in a workshop given by dramaturg, editor, writer and scholar Sydné Mahone. My advisor, Lisa Schlesinger, and my team of dramaturgs, Merric Bower and Micah Ariel James, have been invaluable resources, inspiring me to think more deeply and intersectionally. Unofficial dramaturgy and official inspiration have also been provided by Meredith Alexander, Art Borreca, Jennifer Buckley, Sam Collier, Dare Clubb, Jill Davis, Megan Gogerty, Sarah Lacy Hamilton, Natalie Lurowist, Leigh Marie Marshall, Dr. Christopher-Rasheem McMillan, KT Peterson, Miriam Randolph, Dr. Janette Taylor and the Iowa Playwrights Workshop. I acknowledge and express my deepest gratitude to all of these artists.

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

My work as a queer, feminist playwright is centered around reimagining the presentation of women and other marginalized people on stage. I write highly theatrical comedies meant to highlight and satirize aspects of presentation and representation related to gender, race and power. This play is titled *The Age of Innocence*, like the Edith Wharton novel which I have never read. I learned from the internet that Wharton wrote the novel in 1920 when she was 50 years old and thinking about her childhood days in New York City in the 1870's long before the horrors of WWI. The novel is about the forbidden love and extramarital affair between very wealthy white people who cannot deny their love but are afraid of any impropriety that could threaten their wealth and social status. My play of the same title is inspired by Wharton's novel and also by the very public breakup announcement made by famous television writer-director Jill Soloway and famous poet Eileen Myles. Soloway and Myles announced their breakup at a museum lecture that was supposed to be about queer media and queer literature. They decided to use the public speaking opportunity to publicly announce their breakup and process details of their relationship with the audience. My play is a comedy that borrows the premise of the Soloway Myles breakup announcement and a little of the structure of Wharton's novel to examine gender presentation, race, privilege, romance and age.

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## PREFACE

The writing process for *The Age of Innocence* could aptly be titled The Age of Ignorance. To position myself: I am a queer, white, feminist, 44-year old, cis-woman playwright. Though my creative research has consistently been about the relationship between gender presentation, sexuality and power, the writing process of this play exposed my ignorance regarding race and Trans non-binary gender identification. I discovered some huge blind spots I have while writing a racially specific Black character in an interracial relationship with a racially specific white character who are both newly navigating the world identifying as gender non-binary. I have deepest gratitude for my dramaturgical team and the professors and advisors who helped me to keep writing and researching and shining light on these blind spots helping me to strengthen the work.

The original inspiration for this play was the announcement and public discussion of the break-up of famous writer-director Jill Soloway and famous poet Eileen Myles at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, California on October 26, 2016. There is a video of this discussion on the Hammer Museum website. Soloway and Myles are simultaneously disarmingly candid and unnervingly performative in this appearance. They process not only their whole relationship from how they met, what they wore, where they went to very intimate personal reflections on their changes in presentation and gender identity. I loved how it was simultaneously privileged and indulgent and generous and brave. I couldn't stop thinking about it, and I started writing a play with two characters named Jill and Eileen who process their breakup with an audience.

The title *The Age of Innocence* came to me not because I know anything about the Edith Wharton novel, but because I was struck by the wonder and innocence with which

Soloway and Myles discussed their evolving gender identities even though they were 50 and 66, respectively, at the time the video was shot. They are both sophisticated artists and thinkers and celebrities in their fields, but they both spoke about their butch presentation and use of “they” pronouns as though someone just gave them the keys to Narnia (or Diagon Alley or whatever magical space is an appropriately magical metaphor for the reader). I was thinking about age and about innocence, and then I vaguely remembered it was the title of a novel and thought it sounded good. I haven’t read the novel as of writing this in April 2018, but I did read some synopses. Thematically I found some overlap with the novel, and I used some quotes and structural elements from it.

I wrote the first scene (which became most of Scene 5 in the latest draft) in a workshop with visiting playwright and novelist Kia Corthron. As I have always done in the past, I wrote characters who could be played by actors of any ethnicity. Writing non-racially specific characters in present or future settings has been my white playwright way of avoiding dealing with race in my plays. Shortly after Kia Corthron visited, dramaturg, editor, writer and scholar Sydné Mahone visited the workshop. Mahone was there to work with the playwrights on writing about race. Most of the white playwrights in the room expressed fears that internalized racism and insensitivity would prevent us from writing dimensioned characters of a specific race. I was discussing it with my Latina friend in the Playwrights Workshop, and she said she couldn’t believe all these white playwrights (including me) thought they couldn’t write characters of color.

Mahone challenged all of us to write racially specific characters, and I took up her challenge by changing Eileen to be a specifically white character and Jill to be a specifically Black character. I was excited by the possibility of a character based on Jill

Soloway, who I greatly admire but who is certainly the beneficiary of white privilege and class privilege, being the inspiration for a Black non-binary identified person. My wish or hope for the theatre is always that as theatre artists we can represent what we *want to see* rather than reflect what current reality is.

Writing a Black non-binary person based on a famous white non-binary person has been an extraordinary challenge. The character of Jill is loosely based on a real white person named Jill who is famous. There is no Black equivalent to Jill Soloway because the entertainment industry (and society) is racist and the opportunities and resources available to Soloway would not be as readily accessed for a Black person. Not to say there aren't Black people who are extremely successful in Hollywood, but their rise to success probably looks different than Soloway's because of race. My script advisor and one of my dramaturgs have brought up this issue repeatedly with the question "Is the Jill character a Black person performing whiteness?" And my answer is "No, but I know I need to keep working on it."

My other major challenge has been learning to write non-binary identified characters. One of my dramaturgical team brought issues to my attention that never occurred to me before. The conversations around changing pronouns and their respectful use throughout the script has required attention which, until now, my cis-privilege has allowed me to completely ignore. (Themselves is a word!) Another issue I had never considered is the problem of given names. In the first draft I was thinking of names only as a race issue and the desire to not have a name associated with slavery. This dramaturg brought up the desire to also not have a gendered or mis-gendered name, and the conflicts and stress that renaming oneself brings up with parents and family. These are just two

examples of a host of other issues faced by non-binary people of which I had been previously unaware.

I had a moment today in a meeting with one of my dramaturgs (who is a Black woman) when I had taken us on a tangent from one of her questions about my use of the audience as character. I mentioned that I had just read an article about a play written by a Black playwright being criticized for its assumption that it was being watched by a mostly or entirely white audience and the burden placed on Black audience members in that situation. This dramaturg she said that she is so used to being in audiences of 97% or more white people and has had the exact experience described in the article multiple times. Even when the content is centered on Black characters, there is a burden being placed on audience members of color by the author and by the theatre production by not acknowledging the state of racism in theatre.

Even with struggling to overcome my internalized racism and cis-privilege while writing, I have such deep gratitude for Sydné Mahone's challenge to the playwrights. This process has made me less ignorant of my ignorance at the very least. Maybe the more accurate title of my writing process could be *The Age of Slightly Less Ignorance, but Still a Lot of Work to Be Done*. The process has done so much more than expose my blind spots. My thinking about all aspects of writing a play has been challenged in really exciting, scary and energizing ways. If nothing else, I want to do my part to stop perpetuating plays meant for only cis white audiences. I don't want to write assuming it is a white cisgender audience, or to write with no awareness of who the audience is. If theatre is going to affect change then theatre must change. So I'm changing.

The Age of Innocence  
a play in twelve scenes  
by Nina Morrison

c. 2018

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## Cast of Characters

### JILL

50, Black non-binary person who used to identify as a woman, television and film writer-director-producer, famous, presents andro-femme, but their demeanor is a caricature of femininity, they are cartoonishly, garishly femme

### EILEEN

65, white non-binary person who used to identify as a woman, Boston accent, poet, famous, presents very butch, compliments Jill's feminine behavior with similarly cartoonish performance of masculinity

### ALEXIS

38, woman, any ethnicity, curator-organizer person of museum, artsy, elegant and professional, presents hetero feminine

### DUANE

27, man, any ethnicity, assistant to Alexis, art nerd, presents cis-male

### AUDIENCE

The audience is only heard, never seen. The audience is enthusiastic, adoring and very vocal during the talk being given by Jill and Eileen. This audience is a character and entirely separate from the audience in the theatre watching this play.

## LOCATION

An auditorium in a small museum in Los Angeles, CA.

## TIME

2017, when the fires were raging.

## NOTES

This play was inspired by the break-up of famous writer-director Jill Soloway and famous poet Eileen Myles which they announced and discussed publicly at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, California on October 26, 2016.

The ages of the actors do not necessarily need to approximate the ages of the characters. It is fine if the actors and the character they are playing have a very large age difference. I recommend doing nothing with age makeup or styling in either direction (older or younger).

Jill and Eileen speak into handheld wireless microphones during the entire play until the last scene.

In Scene 1.7 Jill and Eileen perform a wealthy white cis-gendered couple.

In Scene 1.9 Jill and Eileen swap gender performance.

1.

*A compact museum auditorium with a sold-out AUDIENCE of several hundred people.*

*On the stage there are two nice chairs, a small table between the chairs with two bottles of water.*

*The AUDIENCE is antsy and buzzing.*

*JILL and EILEEN enter to thunderous applause and pick up their microphones.*

JILL  
Thank you

EILEEN  
Thank you

JILL  
Thank you

EILEEN  
Thank you

JILL  
We're excited, too.

EILEEN  
This is great.

*AUDIENCE calms.*

JILL  
We are so thrilled to be here.

EILEEN  
This museum is world-renowned, it is an honor to speak here.

JILL  
Absolutely, the textiles, furniture, and, of course, the historic fashion collection.

EILEEN  
I come here every time I visit LA.

JILL

I'm Jill. I'm 50. I'm a famous television writer and director.

EILEEN

Yeah. I'm 65. Do we need to say famous? Fame is so subjective.

JILL

I'm well-known enough to be called famous, and so are you, you're a famous poet. You look so good for 65.

EILEEN

You don't look 50.

JILL

Anyway. We were invited here to talk to you about queer television annnnd--

EILEEN

And queer poetry.

JILL

That is what we were invited to this museum to talk about with you today.

EILEEN

But we're not going to talk about those things.

JILL

We don't want to. It is not what we need.

EILEEN

No.

JILL

We need to talk publicly, in front of an audience, about something else, so what this talk is NOW about is us breaking up.

*There are some audible gasps from the audience.*

EILEEN

We broke up a little while--

JILL

No one believes that we broke up and now we can't get dates.

EILEEN

I actually have gotten dates.

JILL

So have I but not as many as--

EILEEN

I'm sure if people knew then you would--

JILL

We are single polyamorous non-binary--

EILEEN

Humans?

JILL

Right. You know that thing where you can say things in public that you can't say in private? That's what we are going to use this discussion for, because there are some things that I can't bear to say to Eileen in private, but I can say them in front of you, and same for Eileen with me. Eileen and I want to triangulate with you, the audience.

EILEEN

I'm not sure I want to do that

JILL

(sighs)

You do. You know you do. You told me you do.

EILEEN

Okay.

JILL

This talk is being recorded, and I think it's really going to help people.

EILEEN

Yeah it might.

JILL

So we ended our romantic relationship.

EILEEN

A couple of months ago.

JILL

Now we are friends.

*JILL tries to open their water bottle. They can't. They hand it to EILEEN.*

JILL  
Can you?

EILEEN  
Yep.

*EILEEN opens it.*

JILL  
Thanks.

EILEEN  
So we broke up, but like Jill said now we're friends.

JILL  
Now I'm Eileen's "Black friend."

EILEEN  
You are not my only Black friend.

JILL  
I never met any of your other Black friends.

EILEEN  
We just didn't happen to cross paths.

JILL  
Everyone I met with you was white, right? Maybe one Latinx person?

EILEEN  
You're right, that is, that is, uh—totally fair.

JILL  
It's fine, I just, when you said we were friends I had the thought that I would be your "Black friend" that you could tell people that you had, you can be like "I have a Black friend." Legitimately.

EILEEN  
I doubt my friends would ever ask me that.

JILL  
Well some white people are very into that.

EILEEN  
That's true.

JILL

It's a form of value signaling, audience, do you know what that is? I just learned that term and I love it!

EILEEN

It is a useful term. It's when you say "I was hanging out with my Trans friend" or "my Black friend" instead of just saying "my friend" because you want to signal to the person you're talking to that you're cool and have certain kinds of friends or politics or whatever.

JILL

We are so good at panel discussions! They're already learning so much!

EILEEN

Audience, we actually met on a panel discussion.

JILL

I worked really hard on my outfit for when we met.

EILEEN

Your work paid off.

JILL

I was 49 but I wanted to look like a schoolgirl.

EILEEN

I liked it.

JILL

I wanted to be girlfriend material.

EILEEN

Yeah that was the vibe I got. I definitely responded.

JILL

It was so much easier than I thought.

EILEEN

Well that outfit was so good and then you were pretty forward.

JILL

I had been planning it in my head. I was so surprised when it all worked.

EILEEN

You were a real prima ballerina that's for sure.

JILL

I felt like a pretty princess.

EILEEN

You looked so good and we were at that thing, the panel discussion.

JILL

Being really smart together.

EILEEN

That was sexy.

JILL

I was trying to flirt with you by the way I answered questions.

EILEEN

Oh yeah? I think I remember that? I mean, you did so many things, you manipulated me so thoroughly--

JILL

What? No, I didn't manipulate you! I don't need to manipulate you to get what I need from you.

EILEEN

You know what I mean.

JILL

I absolutely do not.

EILEEN

I would have done the same thing I just didn't know things would go that way.

JILL

You didn't really need to prep, I had already developed a huge crush on you before I got to the panel discussion thing.

EILEEN

Thanks.

JILL

After we got together, I was so happy, I got back to LA and I was like "Eileen is into me and I'm into Eileen and we're going to be in love" and I took this long walk, a super long walk, I had so much energy from this new feeling I just kept going, I was, like, walking across LA fueled by love.

EILEEN

We would go on dates where I wasn't the one who knew all the people.

JILL

Right.

EILEEN

It was weird for me.

JILL

I know.

EILEEN

I am used to leading women around the city, but you know your way.

JILL

But with you because you're famous I could be your girlfriend.

EILEEN

Well I guess some of the poets didn't know who you were but you're way more famous than me.

JILL

It felt so good to be your anonymous girlfriend.

EILEEN

That wasn't real.

JILL

Hey everyone, do you wanna know why we broke up?

*Audience shouts YES! EILEEN looks uncomfortable.*

JILL

We'll tell you.

EILEEN

She'll tell you.

JILL

They'll tell you.

EILEEN

Oh right, they'll tell you.

JILL

I use "they" pronouns now.

EILEEN

Just like me.

JILL

Do I know why we broke up?

EILEEN

Well, for one, we were doing long distance.

JILL

True, true, but that probably could have been—

EILEEN

Maybe we would have figured it out if we had tried harder--

JILL

It was my fault.

EILEEN

I don't know about—

JILL

Because I was so inspired--

EILEEN

This is where it gets--

JILL

She's so uncomfortable.

EILEEN

They're so---

JILL

Sorry! Right! God! They're so uncomfortable.

EILEEN

Are we too old to use they pronouns? I am 65.

JILL

You don't look 65. And anyway, don't say things like that. We are all everything. We can evolve, everyone's evolving all the time, we're not dead.

EILEEN

At our age, though.

JILL

I'm only 50. Maybe you're too old.

EILEEN

Maybe.

JILL

I was one hundred percent kidding! No, you're not too old, what a ridiculous concept! Are we too old to be ourselves?

EILEEN

I don't want to be myself if I'm too old for it.

JILL

The real reason we broke up is I started to become more myself.

EILEEN

I really don't think that's why--

JILL

You're still uncomfortable, but we have this audience, we're performing, just perform! You do this all the time!

EILEEN

This is how we met. On a stage.

JILL

Performing, I know, it makes sense.

EILEEN

When you say we broke up because you started to become more yourself it makes me look like a bad guy. There's Eileen who doesn't like Jill anymore because now Jill is being herself. Eileen's a ballsack who doesn't like authentic Jill.

JILL

That's kind of true. In part.

EILEEN

No, it's not!

JILL

We met, and we were in love.

EILEEN

We still love each other I hope.

JILL

Definitely! I still love you!

EILEEN

I guess just tell them why we broke up.

JILL

I changed. I changed the way I look and dress, and I cut my hair really short because I want to grow out my natural hair and

EILEEN

So now I'm a racist. You make it sound like we broke up because I don't like women with natural hair.

JILL

I don't know if you're a racist. You're definitely self-involved.

EILEEN

I love your natural hair, I love all your hairstyles! You're not being honest about why this happened.

JILL

Why did it happen? I'm just telling why I thought it happened but say your version.

EILEEN

We broke up because you didn't want me anymore.

JILL

I did!

EILEEN

Did you show that by *not* having sex with me?

JILL

I was just- my identity was changing. I needed to... what does sex look like when we are changing?

EILEEN

I didn't change really.

JILL

Not as much as me.

EILEEN  
Not really at all.

JILL  
So, me changing broke us up because I had confusion about-- sex-having?

EILEEN  
That is-- sure, yes. No, that's an oversimplification. That sounds like blame. I don't blame you.

JILL  
I just wanted to feel strong in being strong and it's so unfamiliar, it was just taking a while. To the population of those who could date me in the future, I'm fine now. We will have good sex. If it's confusing good sex, it won't be because of any of these issues.

EILEEN  
Who makes up the population of those who could date you?

JILL  
I'm a polyamorous pansexual.

EILEEN  
So, anyone?

JILL  
Right. Anyone.

EILEEN  
It's greedy.

JILL  
No, it's not.

EILEEN  
Before your transformation did you like having sex with me?

JILL  
Yes.

EILEEN  
Yeah we did good.

JILL  
Fuck.

EILEEN

We had some really good times.

*JILL speaks slowly, relishing their memory.*

JILL

You would take your fucking brick house body and crush me to death with it.

EILEEN

Yeah I did that.

JILL

I loved it.

EILEEN

You wrecked me, too, Jill.

JILL

Was it that I wasn't into sex during my transformation? I like that term "transformation." Actually, I only kind of like that term, it has some problems, but for now, let's use it. But could it have been that *you* weren't into sex because I was transforming?

EILEEN

Your change felt like a rejection. You were such a damsel when I met you.

JILL

You were such a cowgirl. You herded me or grabbed me with your lasso or something.

EILEEN

I definitely had spurs on my boots.

JILL

And I was like "carry me away!"

EILEEN

I did carry you away. It was easy. You're small and delicate like a fawn.

JILL

You're like a big construction worker.

EILEEN

If I were a construction worker I would catcall you.

JILL

Thank you.

EILEEN  
You're welcome.

JILL  
But I wanted to do the carrying sometimes!

EILEEN  
You did! But for some reason you didn't think you did.

*ANNOUNCEMENT over PA system "We have been notified by the Los Angeles Fire Department that the fires are moving westward and the wind is unpredictable. At the moment we are asked to stay indoors in our current location. We will keep you informed. You may smell smoke."*

*EILEEN picks up some papers and gets a paper cut. EILEEN panics.*

EILEEN  
Oh shit, Jill!

JILL  
Are you bleeding?

EILEEN  
I got a paper cut.

JILL  
It's so dry, you know these fires, and your skin is so dry.  
(speaking out to audience)  
Can someone bring us a first aid kit?

*DUANE appears with a first aid kit, gives it to JILL, exits.*

*JILL takes EILEEN's injured hand and tends to it gently.*

JILL  
This will sting.

EILEEN  
Okay. I hate blood. You know I hate blood.

*JILL touches EILEEN's cheek to turn their head away from the blood. EILEEN turns their head.*

JILL

It's okay. You're okay.

*JILL puts on the band-aid.*

*JILL touches EILEEN's cheek again so they can turn back.*

JILL

No more blood.

EILEEN

Thank you. I get lightheaded.

JILL

I remember.

EILEEN

Could we take a break for a second?

JILL

Yeah let's do that.

*EILEEN and JILL move to leave.*

JILL

*(speaking out to the audience and to the tech booth)*

Everyone let's take a break. Also, curator-organizer person, are you out there? Can we change our seating? I don't like this; these chairs are not comfortable. Do you have something else? Like a couch or something more cozy, at least more fluffy, cozy chairs? These are so uncomfortable.

*EILEEN takes JILL's hand and pulls them offstage.*

JILL

Okay, okay!

2.

*For a moment the stage is empty, then the CURATOR-ORGANIZER PERSON, ALEXIS and her assistant, DUANE, enter.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE stand still and stare at the chairs like they are sculptures.*

*The audience starts to buzz.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE continue staring at the chairs. Occasionally DUANE looks at ALEXIS looking at the chairs.*

*This takes much, much longer than it should.*

*Eventually, they each carry off one chair. Only the small table with waters and papers on it is left.*

*Audience buzzes more loudly.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE return after a long absence. They are awkwardly carrying a beautiful and delicate antique loveseat from the late 19th century.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE are not accustomed to carrying furniture.*

*They put the couch down and gather themselves. Replacing the chairs with an antique couch is the equivalent of a seismic shift to their art historian sensibilities. They stare at the couch for much longer than they should need to.*

*DUANE adjusts the couch to many different positions.*

*ALEXIS says “No.” until he finds the right spot.*

*When the couch is in the right position, they exit.*

3.

*JILL and EILEEN return. Something about them looks different.*

*JILL is stopped by the beauty of the loveseat.*

JILL

This is so beautiful, is this an antique?

EILEEN

It looks hard.

JILL

(out)

Good job curator-organizer person! This looks much better.

EILEEN

We should reserve judgment until we sit down.

JILL

But this is an improvement already you have to admit. Just visually!

*They sit. The loveseat is small and pretty hard to sit on. They are right next to each other so that they are seated shoulder to shoulder. EILEEN looks uncomfortable.*

*Both look straight ahead.*

EILEEN

(shifting on couch)

See, I'm not sure if this is going to work because—

JILL

(directly to audience)

We just had sex.

*EILEEN puts their head in their hands.*

JILL

What? Why are you doing that? I am celebrating our pleasure!

EILEEN

Can we have something that is just ours? Ever?

JILL

It's still ours!

EILEEN

Why do they need to know that?

JILL

We are here to do this thing with an audience and

EILEEN

It was so unexpected and now—

JILL

It was, I know, I just wanted to be present in this thing we are doing.

EILEEN

It was special.

JILL

How is my telling them making it less special?

EILEEN

I-

JILL

Sorry! No, I'm not! Am I? No, I am sorry. It felt so good and I wanted to share that, alright but I get that maybe you didn't want to share that with our audience.

EILEEN

We are still allowed to have private moments. I wanted that to be something only we knew.

JILL

Please don't say I ruined it.

EILEEN

Well...

JILL

It happened, and it was beautiful. And hot. I love to be reminded of pleasure, pleasure is important.

EILEEN

I'm not saying those things are not true.

JILL

See Audience? I'm not just the stereotypical desexualized overachieving Black woman who is now a non-binary identified person.

EILEEN

I wasn't saying you were-

JILL

I prioritize my self-care which is a radical act for a person of color.

EILEEN

You know we have talked about race more tonight than we ever did in our whole relationship, I think?

JILL

Audience, we literally never talked about race in our relationship!

EILEEN

Why is that?

JILL

Because we were really unhealthy! That's why we are talking about it tonight!

EILEEN

We did talk about race some, though. I know we did.

JILL

We did. We did. In the abstract.

EILEEN

Black Lives Matter is very important to us both.

JILL

This garbage election!

EILEEN

We talked about all the police shootings of unarmed Black men.

JILL

But we didn't talk about how it's different for you than it is for me to watch another news report on another police officer killing another unarmed Black man.

EILEEN

No, we never did. I would get so nervous I would say the wrong thing and I wouldn't say anything, and that was REALLY the wrong thing.

JILL

It's a radical act to center pleasure in my life, and that is why I told them we had sex.

EILEEN

I get it.

JILL

We used to do all these romantic things.

EILEEN

Oh yeah, we are romantics! I couldn't even tell anyone because it would make my friends throw up all over the place.

JILL

We would read to each other.

EILEEN

Poetry. Novels.

JILL

We would stare into each other's eyes.

EILEEN

We went to Paris.

JILL

I wanted to be touching you all the time. I always had a hand on your arm or around your waist.

EILEEN

We sat really close at cafés.

JILL

You put me in your poems.

EILEEN

You were in so many poems.

JILL

I put you in my tv show.

EILEEN

The last book we were reading to each other was Edith Wharton.

JILL

The Age of Innocence. I hate May Welland.

EILEEN

You're so much like her, though.

JILL  
Take it back!

EILEEN  
I just mean you're so pretty.

JILL  
But she's dumb. She's not a feminist.

EILEEN  
Nah, I just meant the prettiness.

JILL  
But I'm the Countess.

EILEEN  
Oh yeah, you are definitely the Countess.

JILL  
I'm the Black Countess.

EILEEN  
You sure are!

JILL  
Are you exoticizing me?

EILEEN  
Only if you want me to be.

*JILL sits up.*

JILL  
Audience, a while ago, I did the big chop so I could start growing out my hair and get back to my natural curl pattern. Now I'm doing this (gesture to hair).

EILEEN  
But I want to be clear that what happened with us had nothing to do with your natural hair which I think is beautiful. All of your hairstyles are beautiful.

JILL  
Thank you. Are you just saying that because you still want Black women to be attracted to you?

EILEEN

No! I really do! I acknowledge my internalized racism, but I genuinely am glad you are growing out your natural curls. You're not the only Black person I've ever dated! You know that!

JILL

You're the only Irish person I've ever dated.

EILEEN

Scotch-Irish.

JILL

I wish I could know my heritage so well.

EILEEN

I'm sorry.

JILL

Remember when Nora came back from Ireland and said everyone looked like you?

EILEEN

Oh yeah, she did say that.

JILL

I can't believe I let you colonize me.

EILEEN

That's how you think of it?

JILL

Not really. Sometimes.

EILEEN

You never called it that when we were together.

JILL

Well I wasn't going to say that to you when we were together, that would have ruined the mood, no?

EILEEN

Your ex-husband is white.

JILL

That marriage was a colonization in many ways.

EILEEN  
Sounded like it.

JILL  
I'm thinking about changing my name. I have a white woman's name, it's a white woman-gendered name.

EILEEN  
You should change it if you want to. I do like it, though. But I'm sure I would like the new one.

JILL  
Am I hurting my parents to erase the name they gave me?

EILEEN  
I didn't think of that.

JILL  
How many other Black women and non-binary persons have you dated?

EILEEN  
I can't remember.

JILL  
How many curl patterns have been underneath those hands?

EILEEN  
I get around.

JILL  
I hate when white people say that they have learned about different cultures when they have dated someone from a different culture.

EILEEN  
I don't say that. Ever.

JILL  
Good. Don't. It's gross. Fucking someone from a different culture than yours is not the same as actually making an effort to learn about that culture.

EILEEN  
Again, I want to clarify to our audience that none of what we are saying is why we broke up. Right?

JILL

No, it wasn't. Let's go back to that. I wanted to look different. I changed the way I dress, too. I stopped wearing make-up.

EILEEN

You REALLY changed how you dress.

JILL

I don't wear skirts or dresses anymore.

EILEEN

You wear button-up shirts a lot more.

JILL

I always did that.

EILEEN

Oh.

JILL

Even with going natural, the style at first was more--

EILEEN

Masculine.

JILL

Androgynous I was going to say.

EILEEN

Sure

JILL

I didn't want to perform that gender anymore. I wanted to do this different performance.

EILEEN

Well you can't be surprised when your different performance brings in a different audience.

JILL

That's true.

EILEEN

This still isn't why we broke up, though.

JILL

I know but this is an important factor.

EILEEN

Yeah I'm clarifying, but this is an important thing that happened, you're right.

JILL

I started seeing the way Eileen moves through the world. They have power.

EILEEN

*You* have so much power.

JILL

Because I do tv?

EILEEN

Arguably, that is the most power one can have, a media that reaches so many.

JILL

But I saw how you are with women. And men I guess, too. You command the room. You get listened to in a way that I wanted to be listened to. Women look at you differently.

EILEEN

Yep.

JILL

It's so cold in here. There's fires outside so I guess they blast the AC.

EILEEN

You're cold?

JILL

I have such a chill.

*EILEEN takes off their jacket and places it lovingly on JILL's shoulders.*

JILL

Thank you. See audience? Do you all want Eileen to be your girlfriend now?

*Noises are heard from AUDIENCE.*

*It sounds like the answer is a resounding YES.*

JILL

So did I.

EILEEN  
I feel objectified.

JILL  
Audience, do you also want to BE Eileen, though?

*Another big YES from the audience.*

EILEEN  
Thank you very much, audience. It's not that great.

JILL  
You basically get treated like a white dude. I'd say that's great.

EILEEN  
As I'm sure you can imagine, my presentation has not always been celebrated.

JILL  
Sure but you could choose.

EILEEN  
How so?

JILL  
You could have femme-ed out. You could be a glamazon. You could choose to hide in the closet.

EILEEN  
I suppose I could.

JILL  
I don't want you to do that, and you shouldn't have to do that, but you have that option.

EILEEN  
In a way, but that is self-harm of a sort.

JILL  
I'm saying this because I don't get to hide being Black.

EILEEN  
Yes, yes, you're right. I have a different, I have... options. Those options feel like they would kill me, though.

JILL  
But they wouldn't in a literal sense is all I'm saying.

EILEEN

No. They wouldn't. This is also not really why we broke up.

JILL

There were so many expectations put on us once we started dating.

EILEEN

We were supposed to be this lesbian supercouple.

JILL

I liked that people were saying that.

EILEEN

We got followed by photographers.

JILL

That was nice, too.

EILEEN

It made me paranoid.

JILL

No one ever followed me and my husband around.

EILEEN

(laughing)

No one gives a shit about you two.

JILL

I know! They definitely gave a shit about us.

EILEEN

You didn't finish explaining your change.

JILL

I don't know how much more I can explain it. I saw you presenting in this way and I thought I can do that. I could get that same kind of attention. On the set I wouldn't be apologizing and swoony. I could be direct.

EILEEN

Why are you so- why don't you see what you are? You're this incredibly powerful tv executive.

JILL

Everything I wore, the way I spoke, the way I walked, the sound of my voice, every single thing about me was to please. Because I'm ambitious, I subsumed all of my own

needs to be sure that no one felt uncomfortable. If one person was uncomfortable, I failed. If the person at craft service was uncomfortable, I failed. If a grip felt weird about working for a Black woman, I failed. If I said anything that accidentally reminds anyone of their whiteness and my Blackness, I failed. My career was in constant jeopardy. I have to be careful all the time. I have to be so fucking careful. You don't know what this feels like. You can't know.

EILEEN

I'm sorry. You're right. I can't know.

JILL

And then I see you and how you are and poets aren't supposed to have any power or money and you're like this big swinging dick through the world and I thought FUCK IT. I WANT THAT.

EILEEN

That makes so much sense. I'm sorry.

JILL

Then I threw out all my make-up and my dresses and I chopped off my hair.

EILEEN

Yeah. Yeah.

JILL

Then you fucked a girl 40 years younger than you and I caught you together.

EILEEN

Nooooo! No! No. No. No. That is not... Audience! That is not what happened! You didn't catch me, first of all, we were already trying out an open relationship. You saw us at a bar. I actually DID catch YOU getting piped by some studio exec douchebag! Remember that, when I walked into your place and couldn't find you, then I did find you? You are not the victim. You aren't. We had basically broken up already and we were being "open" because that was what you wanted. Remember?

JILL

I remember. Audience, what I said just now was a little unfair.

EILEEN

Yes. It was.

JILL

Even though what I said is not actually what happened, that is how I felt!

EILEEN

Are you sure you're queer?

JILL

Why would you ask when we were just in this queer relationship together that has ended, but it happened. We were queer on each other just a few minutes ago!

EILEEN

But before me?

JILL

Before you, I was married.

EILEEN

You were faithful?

JILL

I didn't say that.

EILEEN

Oh so—

JILL

I didn't want him to learn that this way. Wait, this is so public.

EILEEN

He's not going to watch this, he's not thinking about you.

JILL

I don't know how you presume to know what my ex-husband is thinking about.

EILEEN

I don't know what he is thinking about, but I do know that you assume that everyone is thinking about you all the time.

JILL

I can't believe you and I just had--

EILEEN

That makes me feel guilty for saying that.

JILL

You told me guilt doesn't exist.

EILEEN

Haha, did I?

JILL

That is a flirting technique of yours.

EILEEN

It briefly worked!

JILL

Let's get back to you straight-shaming me.

EILEEN

Okay.

JILL

I was with men. Now I don't want to be with men exclusively. I used to look like someone who wanted attention from men. Then I met you.

EILEEN

I gave you attention.

JILL

And I gave you attention.

EILEEN

Then you wanted to be a real queer and you cut your hair and wear men's clothes and now we both use they pronouns.

JILL

And you dumped me.

EILEEN

No! Don't oversimplify! It was mutual, we dumped each other. People now interview you about your "they" pronouns even though—

JILL

What—

EILEEN

I mean you just did it like getting a nose piercing.

JILL

A nose piercing is the most current trend you can think of?

EILEEN

You know what I mean.

JILL

I think those became a thing 35 years ago.

EILEEN

Like an accessory.

JILL

You're just mad because I don't want to do your whole ancient butch/femme thing which is so over by the way. We are all everything, and you don't want to admit that.

EILEEN

It's ancient because it has withstood the test of time. You used to be so hot, now you're a theory factory.

JILL

There was this moment when I was so in love with you and I was so happy

EILEEN

You will have that moment again with someone else, maybe they will be a poet, too

JILL

I hate poets.

EILEEN

That's fair.

JILL

You do not get to own this moment being all butch and old.

EILEEN

You always make age comments.

JILL

I'm fifteen years younger than you, and I'm the oldest person you've ever dated.

Audience, this is the smallest age gap Eileen has ever known.

EILEEN

Not EVER, but yes, for the past few...decades. I can't help that I like a certain dynamic.

JILL

It was nice to be anonymously on your arm. I will admit that.

EILEEN

But you dumped me. Or, we dumped each other.

JILL

It wasn't working anymore.

EILEEN

I still think it had something to do with the panther dream.

JILL

I loved a panther in a dream. We did not have sex, but I loved him romantically.

EILEEN

You wouldn't stop talking about that panther. And the dream coincided exactly with your transformation.

JILL

Audience, I had a recurring dream during my transformation. In the dream I would go to work, I would be on set with all these people I know, my friends and colleagues, and I was there looking really different than I used to and they turned away from me. They all turned their backs to me, and I felt betrayed, but also I knew that they did not have faces anymore. I knew this in dream knowledge, I didn't actually see their faceless heads. I was sad and lonely because my friends were now faceless and turned away from me, but also I was turned on because I felt very free. No one was looking at me. A panther came onto the set and he had a crush on me. He was obsessed with me. He wanted to have sex, but I wouldn't have sex with him, I was afraid he would break my heart. I had the dream so many times that I felt like I was falling in love with him.

EILEEN

You really wouldn't stop talking about that panther. It must be symbolic.

JILL

I think the panther was you. When I would go out in the city with you, nobody knew me. Nobody was trying to pitch their show to me.

EILEEN

But you got us into places, that is usually my thing I can show off with, but you have a career and fame. I have nothing to offer you.

JILL

You have helped me see my own potential, I don't think that's nothing.

EILEEN

I'm glad I inspired you.

JILL

I'm never going to be the object again!

EILEEN

You hate objectification.

JILL

Not always.

EILEEN

Right, from panthers it's okay. Goddammit. You're so confusing. I need a break.

*AUDIENCE woos a little.*

EILEEN

We're *not* gonna have sex on this break.

*ANNOUNCEMENT over the PA system "The winds have shifted direction, the fires are heading South, all are advised to stay inside. Exposure to the air outside for more than 8 consecutive minutes could cause lasting lung damage. Be advised, stay inside."*

EILEEN

LA is so fucking creepy. Maybe that's what broke us up.

*EILEEN looks at the loveseat where JILL is still seated.*

EILEEN

And curator person? If you're out there, I can't sit like this! Can you bring back one of those chairs?

JILL

But can we keep the loveseat for me? I still want to sit on it!

*EILEEN walks off not waiting for JILL. JILL follows slowly.*

4.

*AUDIENCE buzzes.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE appear after a moment. DUANE has one of the chairs he took away before. ALEXIS is carrying an arrangement of exotic flowers.*

*ALEXIS puts the flowers down and watches DUANE put the chair down. ALEXIS and DUANE stare at the chair, table and couch for a very long time.*

*ALEXIS carefully picks up the flower arrangement and sets it on the table. ALEXIS and DUANE stare at the flower arrangement for a very long time.*

*DUANE makes one barely perceptible change to the flower arrangement. ALEXIS says "Yes," and turns and exits. DUANE follows her.*

*The stage remains empty for 8 minutes. This is not an intermission. House lights do not come up.*

*The AUDIENCE continues to buzz.*

5.

*EILEEN and JILL enter. Something about them is different.*

*EILEEN sees the chair and goes to it, sits, looks out and speaks into the audience.*

EILEEN

Thank you for the chair!

JILL

Audience, I want to clarify some things. Sometimes I get upset and like I said before, I let things snowball in my mind. When I saw Eileen with this young woman at the bar, I was at a very vulnerable place. Things weren't working between me and Eileen and I was sad. I had taken solace in this guy from my work, it was meaningless.

EILEEN

We just had sex again. During the break just now. That was-- That was a surprise!

JILL

I can't believe you told them! Are you taking revenge?

EILEEN

No! What? I thought you would want them to know. I had to tell them because I had gotten so mad before that you told them. So now I'm telling them. I'm happy!

JILL

Now I see why you wanted to have private things for only us.

EILEEN

I thought you wanted to celebrate pleasure!

JILL

I do! Privately!

EILEEN

What did you mean by you had "taken solace" in that guy?

JILL

You remember what a mess I was.

EILEEN

Yes.

JILL

I had drastically changed my appearance and then I felt so ugly. I felt I had made myself hideous. Then I was ashamed for being so shallow, but the feelings didn't go away. I knew this guy had a crush on me. He's pretty open about everything. He's a man so he's like (gesturing) "Here's my every thought from every second of the day! Don't you want to hear it!" He thought I was pretty and told me how pretty I was and I was thinking that I was a monster but he was into me. I needed it. I needed to be the girl, I needed to know I was liked. This guy worshipped me, I needed that.

EILEEN

You had that with me.

JILL

Well you and that woman, how could I compete with a fucking 25-year-old?

EILEEN

That happened after you left. If you hadn't left there would be no competition.

JILL

You asked me to leave.

EILEEN

No, I asked for a little space. That's not asking you to leave.

JILL

I just needed to play at being weak again.

EILEEN

I needed to play at being strong again. That was why I needed the space. I know I am strong, but I wanted to be with someone who would exaggerate.

JILL

I tried, but I just couldn't do it.

EILEEN

Me, too, with you.

JILL

This is really why we broke up.

EILEEN

Because we started sleeping with other people who could give us what we were familiar with?

JILL

Right.

EILEEN

That's not the real reason.

JILL

No, it is.

EILEEN

No, really, when I think about it, our switch to being "open" was a symptom, we weren't honest with each other.

JILL

This guy wanted to take me out and order my dinner and the whole thing.

EILEEN

I did that, too.

JILL

But with you I was trying to be more—

EILEEN

Like me?

JILL

Yeah! And with him I took a break from trying new things. It was so easy to make him feel like a man.

EILEEN

This girl just wanted me to take her places so she could be looked at. She wanted to receive pleasure. She loved when I would lead her around. I'm so good at that stuff.

JILL

It's not like I wanted a ring.

EILEEN

You specifically said I want a ring!

JILL

As a joke!

EILEEN

You showed me ones that you liked.

JILL

As a joke.

EILEEN

Then I bought you a ring.

JILL

A friendship ring.

EILEEN

That is how things start with jewelry that is relationship based. We signal that we have a very strong friendship marked by jewelry.

JILL

I didn't really want it, I'm not some capitalist.

EILEEN

I think you wanted to be claimed by me.

JILL

Maybe if it had something to do with your grandmother.

EILEEN

My grandmother controlled my whole family.

JILL

Your grandmother? Is that an Irish thing?

EILEEN

My Irishness doesn't have anything to do with my grandmother's behavior.

JILL

Which grandmother controls your family?

EILEEN

My maternal one, the one with all the jewelry.

JILL

Oh, you could have given me one of her rings. I would have liked that kind of ring, antique, something that has to do with—

*A mysterious noise.*

JILL

What was that?

EILEEN

Is someone tuning a guitar on the PA system?

JILL  
Ohhhh.

EILEEN  
Do you know what the sound is?

JILL  
Because we are here announcing the end of something I thought I would invite—

EILEEN?  
What, you would invite what or whom or what?

JILL  
I felt there needed to be a processional, something to mark this, spiritually.

EILEEN  
We were together for just under a year and—

JILL  
You gave me a large friendship ring, and now I have hired a processional.

EILEEN  
What kind of processional?

JILL  
A bagpipe processional.

EILEEN  
I am Scotch-Irish so that was thoughtful.

*We hear bagpipes playing outside. They are loud enough to be clearly heard though they are outside.*

JILL  
They're so loud. You can really hear them.

*EILEEN takes JILL in their arms.*

EILEEN  
Thank you for marking this day.

JILL  
You're welcome.

*Jill cries a little.*

*The bagpipers play.*

*Eileen and Jill dance to the bagpipe music.*

*Eileen leads, it seems romantic. They talk as they dance.*

JILL

Are we still broken up?

EILEEN

As far as I can tell.

JILL

Sometimes you do these nice things and then I'm like what?

EILEEN

Just remind yourself how old I am.

JILL

You really are anciently old. That's why you're so good at this stuff, you just lead in dances.

EILEEN

You just follow.

JILL

You hold me.

EILEEN

You cry.

JILL

I'm strong, too

EILEEN

But I'm never weak.

JILL

You have to be weak sometimes.

EILEEN

I don't allow myself to feel sadness

JILL

That makes you so attractive

EILEEN

But remember, I'm old.

JILL

Thank you I remember. You're so old, I say that to make myself feel better about us being broken up.

*They dance until the bagpipes stop.*

*JILL steps away.*

*JILL looks out at the AUDIENCE and speaks loudly to them.*

JILL

You are going to feel sadness today. Give me the blood from your bodies, the fires are raging. Who is on their period? Give me your pads! Give me your tampons!

*We hear rustling and shuffling in the audience and then bloody pads and tampons are thrown onto the stage.*

EILEEN

You're a witch.

JILL

Don't act like you didn't know.

*JILL gathers the tampons and pads and wipes them across their heart and down their arms.*

EILEEN

You can't do that spell here.

JILL

Too late, I'm doing it.

EILEEN

I think there's men here, it's dangerous

JILL

So many things are dangerous for not-men. The men here will have to fend for themselves.

*More shuffling and bustling in the audience, then singing? Is it singing, or a tone, maybe it is OM, permeates the lecture hall.*

*Light floods through the auditorium, it is blinding and warm. A choral sound of many voices*

EILEEN

Look what you've done.

JILL

Everyone should have the chance to feel everything, including sadness.

*A tortoise appears and slowly walks across the stage.*

JILL

So cute!

EILEEN

So old, just like me.

JILL

They know things.

EILEEN

Sweetheart.

JILL

Yes?

EILEEN

Look at that little aged creature.

JILL

It's beautiful.

EILEEN

Time manifests.

JILL

Ohhhh, I see why you're sad

EILEEN

Because I'm old?

JILL

You know things!

EILEEN

I honestly should know so many more things considering—

JILL  
Considering how hard you've lived?

EILEEN  
Partying has not imparted the kind of wisdom I had been hoping for.

JILL  
Are you upset?

EILEEN  
I guess so?

JILL  
Don't cry.

*EILEEN cries a little. JILL takes EILEEN in their arms.*

*EILEEN cries harder.*

EILEEN  
I never had that much to show off about, and then when you were with me, I didn't have anything... but you thought I did or wanted to be part of some fantasy where you could be invisible with me.

*JILL is still holding EILEEN.*

JILL  
It was too much to ask of you. You don't have to do that anymore.

EILEEN  
Don't let me go. Please.

JILL  
I won't. You're so fragile.

EILEEN  
But then later?

JILL  
Later I will probably leave.

EILEEN  
I'll be so broken.

JILL

No, I'll wait until you're stronger. I'll wait until it will devastate me, not you.

EILEEN

How do you know these things?

JILL

I can smell the smoke. Can you smell it?

EILEEN

Yeah.

*AUDIENCE murmurs in agreement.*

JILL

We can't leave though.

EILEEN

It's dangerous.

JILL

I have an idea, but we might get in trouble, but it might be worth it.

EILEEN

Get in trouble?

JILL

Come with me.

*JILL runs off.*

*EILEEN follows.*

6.

*AUDIENCE buzzes. The words “smoke” and “trapped” and “changing” and “wind” can be heard.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE appear.*

*DUANE ceremoniously picks up all of the pads and tampons and exits.*

*ALEXIS stares, unmoving, at the flower arrangement. Eventually, she goes to the arrangement and moves one flower and then goes back to staring at it.*

*DUANE returns and stands next to ALEXIS. He notices the change she has made to the arrangement and points at the flowers and says “Oh.”*

*ALEXIS and DUANE jump when excerpts from the audio tour of the 1870’s fashion exhibit are heard amplified over the PA system. The AUDIENCE quiets.*

*Over the PA we hear “The feminine silhouette of the upper class American woman in the 1870’s...[The sound of a horse-drawn carriage on pavement is heard.] New York City in the gilded age.”*

*ALEXIS and DUANE look around to see where it’s coming from. They exit quickly to go and find the source of the sound.*

7.

*EILEEN enters wearing head-to-toe authentic men's formal wear from the 1870's or so. They have a three-piece suit and top hat, this is what a wealthy lawyer in New York would wear.*

*EILEEN lays their jacket on the floor and JILL enters in head to toe authentic women's formal wear from the 1870's or so. They have a glamorous detailed dress with underpinnings and layered skirts and a lavish fur collar.*

*EILEEN holds JILL's hand as they gingerly step onto the jacket and onto the stage.*

EILEEN  
Careful.

JILL  
Thank you.

*JILL is even more feminine than before. EILEEN is even more masculine. They both speak differently as though they are actors playing a melodrama: breathless, intense, and highly stylized.*

*EILEEN leads JILL to the loveseat.*

*They pick up their microphones.*

EILEEN  
(whispering)  
Where do we start?

JILL  
(whispering)  
Just do whatever you remember.

EILEEN  
(to audience)  
I'm Newland Archer.

JILL  
(to audience)  
I'm Countess Ellen Olenska.

EILEEN  
I had to see you!

JILL  
I fear you have news.

EILEEN  
I do.

JILL  
Tell me.

EILEEN  
Don't leave the count.

JILL  
Why?

EILEEN  
If you leave your marriage it would be selfish, and you would be looked on by our society as less than.

JILL  
The count is a beast, a monster, why would you tell me to stay with him?

EILEEN  
(forgetting)  
Uhhh...

JILL  
(leading)  
You're not going to MARRY anyone, are you?

EILEEN  
OH...I am! I have to marry the 25-year-old!

JILL  
No! NO! I can't bear this.

EILEEN  
Grandmother arranged it. Before I met you.

JILL  
Your grandmother knows the girl's worth, and so do you. Give that up! For me, give it up for me.

EILEEN  
And be outcasts, and live with no money?

JILL

I won't go back to Poland!

EILEEN

If you leave the count, you will be shunned.

JILL

He hits me.

EILEEN

I will kill him.

JILL

No! Don't send me back.

EILEEN

I won't. Don't get a divorce.

JILL

Easy for you to say, you're a man.

EILEEN

You're a wealthy white woman.

JILL

And you are a wealthy white man, but our wealth can be taken from us at anytime, by the count, by your grandmother, by so much disapproval...

EILEEN

I need you here. I can arrange an apartment.

JILL

Everyone will know!

EILEEN

Damn them! Whether or not they know, we are following the rules. We are still within the bounds of polite society.

JILL

I don't want to be polite with you.

*EILEEN strides over to JILL and wraps their arm around JILL's waist, holding JILL in a close embrace.*

EILEEN  
Never.

*JILL gasps and becomes breathless.*

EILEEN  
Never polite my love.

*EILEEN slowly leans towards JILL's lips. JILL suddenly leaps out of their embrace.*

JILL  
You will have a child with someone else.

EILEEN  
And perhaps so will you my love. We play these roles, but I am always your man.

JILL  
Am I always your woman?

EILEEN  
Always.

JILL  
When you leave, I never know when I will see you again.

EILEEN  
When I walk towards the door to leave you I get so lightheaded, you know I have my spells. My body doesn't want me to leave.

JILL  
I ache for you.

EILEEN  
I will arrange an apartment. And when we are not together I will send letters daily, twice, thrice daily.

JILL  
I will do the same. How else could I bear this?

EILEEN  
I will write all the secret things we will do to each other when next we meet.

JILL  
I will write every stupid detail of my days without you.

EILEEN

I will read and re-read each one until the next one arrives. This world is so good to us. We have money, soon I will have a child, grandmother will be satisfied, and we can be together in our way. You will be the light in my joyless life.

JILL

Even though I am a rich white woman with almost no knowledge of the capacity for human cruelty, I am in constant misery unless I am with you.

EILEEN

“Each time you happen to me all over again.”

JILL

“We can’t behave like people in novels, though, can we?”

EILEEN

Come to my chambers, we don’t have much time!

*EILEEN grabs JILL’s hands and picks them up and they rush offstage. JILL is making many gasping, sighing sounds as they exit.*

8.

*AUDIENCE buzzes. We hear “Edith Wharton?” and “before World War I?” and “19<sup>th</sup> century fashion exhibit?” from the AUDIENCE.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE enter in a panic. They step onto the stage and then stop and stare at the furniture for 10 seconds, then they stare at each other for 10 seconds.*

*They jump again when they hear excerpts from the audio tour of the 1920’s fashion exhibit played over the PA system [“The roaring 20’s! The Jazz Age!”]*

*ALEXIS and DUANE listen closely. How is this audio being amplified? They are mystified. Something is happening, and it is beyond their control.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE look at each other for 5 seconds and then walk off together.*

9.

*JILL enters, swaggering and dapper in a 1920's men's suit. They are wildly energetic, and their energy is filled with optimism.*

JILL

Come on in, dollface, don't be shy!

*EILEEN enters. They are in a floor-length satin intricately beaded drop waist gown with matching beaded head piece and heeled slippers.*

*Everything about EILEEN is softness, curving and receptive. Their voice is softer and higher. Their femininity is palpable.*

EILEEN

This is the place, huh?

JILL

You like it?

EILEEN

Hotsy-totsy!

JILL

Good enough for you?

EILEEN

If it has you in it.

JILL

Are you my dame?

EILEEN

(blushing)

You know I am.

JILL

Live here with me.

EILEEN

Have you been drinking panther piss? You must be ossified!

JILL

Baby this is New York City. It's the 20's. Nobody cares that I'm Black.

EILEEN  
Horsefeathers!

JILL  
You got the gams and I got the clams!

EILEEN  
Is the war really over?

JILL  
You bet it is.

EILEEN  
Jill that war, who could have known that we had the capacity to do such things to our fellow man. We made war machines.

JILL  
Sweetcheeks, we didn't make those machines. Now don't let yourself get into a—

EILEEN  
Humans made those machines. That war took so much from me and what can I do about it?

JILL  
I know what you mean, but let's —

EILEEN  
And you are the handsomest, kindest, richest, most brilliant and successful cat I've ever known! I can't believe I'm lucky enough that someone like you even noticed me.

JILL  
Oh, now Eileen! I saw you standing there that day looking like a cancelled stamp.

EILEEN  
I thought my sadness would destroy me and then you saw me. You saw me at a moment when my whole world was taken from me, but you have hope still. How?

JILL  
Sweet tomato, what could I do? You are the ant's pants, the oyster's earrings AND the bee's knees!

EILEEN  
And now even though you are the absolute best fella I've ever known, we can't be together, not really, because someone decided that African heritage makes you so different than me. Something that you couldn't choose makes you less than me, when I could never be one tiny speck as good as you.

JILL  
The world is changing Eileen.

EILEEN  
Tell it to Sweeney!

JILL  
I won't let them take you from me.

EILEEN  
I won't ever let them find us. I won't tell a soul. Daddy would kill me.

JILL  
Your daddy loves you.

EILEEN  
If he found us together...

JILL  
Let me blind him with my money!

EILEEN  
Stop carrying on about it, I'm gonna get upset.

JILL  
Alright, alright, don't have a spell.

EILEEN  
You know I get lightheaded.

JILL  
You're a delicate flower, my Irish lassie.

EILEEN  
I have such a chill!

*JILL takes off their jacket and places it on EILEEN's shoulders.*

EILEEN  
Will you read to me?

*DUANE enters carrying a worn copy of Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence.*

*DUANE hands the book to JILL and exits.*

JILL

Thank you young man. That's my butler.

EILEEN

How nice.

JILL

Let's ease your mind, think about better times. Let's read a little Edith Wharton.

EILEEN

You know my favorite parts.

JILL

Settle in my love.

*EILEEN settles in on the loveseat. JILL opens the book dramatically.*

EILEEN

My sweet, read and calm my nerves.

JILL

(reading theatrically)

"Each time you happen to me all over again"

*EILEEN laughs.*

EILEEN

All over again!

*JILL continues.*

JILL

(reading)

"We can't behave like people in novels, though, can we?"

EILEEN

"People in novels!"

*JILL flips through the book.*

EILEEN

Am I really as pretty as May Welland?

JILL

Twice as pretty! Half as dumb!

EILEEN

She was a feeble-minded little gal.

*JILL flips through the book.*

JILL

(reading)

"The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend!"

EILEEN

She has a point there.

JILL

Seems like there must have been a better way for them.

EILEEN

Oh to be wealthy white people in love before the horrors we know. They get to live out their lives and the worst thing that happens is some romantic entanglement that they could easily solve.

JILL of

But they wouldn't be as rich if they "solved" it. Being less rich leads to a loss romantic feelings.

EILEEN

Oh my Jill! Things have got to get better, right? It's 1920! Now we can both vote! Don't you think things will get better for both of us?

JILL

No.

EILEEN

In the novel, they weren't thinking about money or war machines or lynchings, nothing but their forbidden love.

JILL

In the novel, they weren't thinking about big banks or mass shootings or policemen shooting unarmed Black men and never getting punished for it.

EILEEN

Oh God Jill what if someone hurt you? I would die.

JILL  
So would I.

*JILL takes EILEEN's hand as they read them the next passage.*

JILL  
(reading)

"I want— I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that— categories like that— won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter."

*JILL's eyes fill with tears and they pull away their hand and throw down the book.*

JILL  
Damn it. That is what I want. Damn this book.

EILEEN  
My love. They never have it either. Maybe no one does.

*ALEXIS and DUANE enter, stricken.*

ALEXIS  
The fires have reached us.

*DUANE cries a little. ALEXIS comforts him.*

*JILL grabs EILEEN's hands and both run off.*

*AUDIENCE buzzes, they sound panicked.*

10.

*DUANE picks up the book and looks at ALEXIS then reads aloud.*

DUANE  
(reading)

"Each time you happen to me all over again."

*ALEXIS sighs and touches DUANE's arm.*

ALEXIS  
Oh Duane.

DUANE  
Yes?

ALEXIS  
I'm cold.

*DUANE lays his jacket over her shoulders.*

ALEXIS  
Thank you.

DUANE  
Can we sit?

*ALEXIS pulls him to the floor. He lays his head in her lap. She strokes his hair.*

DUANE  
I get so lightheaded.

*Smoke begins to fill the space.*

11.

*Sound of fire and HVAC system on overdrive and music that would accompany an apocalyptic scene.*

*Smoke is pouring in. This whole scene is both a ritual of mourning and a dance of celebration.*

*JILL and EILEEN enter, wearing their normal clothes. They take in ALEXIS and DUANE.*

*JILL and EILEEN pick up microphones and address the audience.*

JILL

It's true. The building is on fire. Everything's burning. Our warning systems burned.

EILEEN

Audience! We are lost now. Say whatever it is you wanted to say. Break any rule.

JILL

We are finished. Propriety is meaningless.

*JILL and EILEEN embrace passionately in the same melodramatic style they embraced in when they were acting out the book.*

*ALEXIS and DUANE also embrace passionately as though they are in the 1870's.*

*As the smoke fills the room they are all variously assuming poses of masculinity and femininity, ALEXIS and DUANE repeat the stylized embraces and poses that JILL and EILEEN take.*

*Both pairs are trading off throwing jackets down, dancing the lead, dancing the follow, smelling the flowers, plucking the petals from the flowers, putting flowers in the other's hair, helping the other sit, helping the other stand, stroking the other's hair, etc. etc.*

JILL

Are you cold?

ALEXIS

Are you cold?

EILEEN

Yes.

*EILEEN shivers. JILL takes their jacket and puts it on EILEEN's shoulders.*

DUANE  
Yes. I'm so cold.

*DUANE shivers.*

EILEEN  
I'm so cold.

*ALEXIS puts her jacket over DUANE's shoulders.*

ALEXIS  
Here. As the fire burns, the HVAC system reacts. We will get colder and colder. We may freeze to death rather than burn.

*Smoke continues to pour in and ash.*

DUANE  
I want somehow to get away with you

*DUANE takes ALEXIS by the waist.*

*ALEXIS breaks away.*

ALEXIS  
I want somehow to get away with you

*ALEXIS takes DUANE by the waist.*

*DUANE breaks away.*

EILEEN  
I want somehow to get away with you

*EILEEN takes JILL by the waist.*

*JILL breaks away.*

JILL  
I want somehow to get away with you-

*JILL takes EILEEN by the waist.*

*EILEEN breaks away.*

AUDIENCE

I want somehow to get away with you-

*Smoke continues to fill the room.*

DUANE

I want—

ALEXIS

I want somehow to get away with you

EILEEN

-into a world where words like that— categories like that— won't exist.

JILL

Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other,

ALEXIS

-who are the whole of life to each other,

DUANE

-and nothing else on earth will matter.

JILL

The categories don't exist anymore. We have it now. What Edith Wharton was dreaming of, we have it.

EILEEN

Did you want to have this moment with me?

JILL

I think this moment is the reason I met you.

EILEEN

So we could have this moment?

JILL

Yes.

DUANE

I want somehow to get away with you—

ALEXIS

We can't behave like people in novels, though, can we?

*DUANE and ALEXIS embrace.*

EILEEN  
We have it here, now.

*EILEEN and JILL embrace.*

JILL  
Please hold me as we burn. We have nothing else.

EILEEN  
We have this moment.

JILL  
I wish we didn't have to burn to have this.

*A very bright light.*

12.

*26 years later in the year 2043.*

*PROJECTION ON UPSTAGE WALL: 26 YEARS LATER*

*The auditorium floor and furniture and flowers are all still there, but they are now covered in ash.*

*A bed of sound, wind or future sounds – blips and beeps?*

*DUANE wanders in with EILEEN.*

DUANE

Is Jill coming?

EILEEN

Jill and I have not seen each other since that day.

DUANE

That day 26 years ago? But, why?

EILEEN

Everything burned, even what was between us, all that was shared, burned that day.

DUANE

Jill's office is right around the corner. Let's go.

EILEEN

No.

DUANE

I heard the things you said to each other. It's wrong for you to be apart.

EILEEN

We can't be together.

DUANE

Madness!

*DUANE slaps EILEEN across the face.*

EILEEN

You can't slap me! I'm 91 years old!

*EILEEN punches DUANE across the face.*

DUANE

I'm 53 years old, and that hurt! Anyway, you look fantastically healthy! You need a slap in the face! You can't be given a second chance and waste it! You can't!

EILEEN

We felt it. You have to trust me.

DUANE

Do you send letters at least?

EILEEN

No. Jill's here in LA, I'm hardly ever here. It's not convenient.

DUANE

To send letters?

EILEEN

No, it's not convenient to think of things to say in letters.

*DUANE becomes more determined.*

DUANE

We all promised each other we would come here 26 years later.

EILEEN

Jill hasn't asked me to come. It's presumptuous.

DUANE

No, we already planned it! What will I tell Alexis?

EILEEN

Please give up on me, I never want to feel hope again.

*DUANE takes the worn copy of The Age of Innocence out of his bag.*

DUANE

Alexis and I still read to each other just like you and Jill did.

*DUANE flips the book open and reads.*

DUANE

(reading theatrically)

"The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend!"

*EILEEN takes this in for a moment.*

EILEEN  
Take me to Jill. Now!

DUANE  
Follow me.

EILEEN  
I hope I'm not too late.

*DUANE and EILEEN run off.*

*A moment of empty stage.*

*JILL and ALEXIS enter.*

ALEXIS  
"We can't behave like people in novels, though, can we?"

JILL  
That's the last thing I heard you say.

ALEXIS  
26 years ago. Just like in the novel.

JILL  
Yeah, just like the novel.

ALEXIS  
This is the place. This is where it happened.

JILL  
I'm 76 years old now.

ALEXIS  
You look the same.

JILL  
Thanks. How old are you now?

ALEXIS  
64.

JILL  
You look the same, too.

*ALEXIS and JILL wander through the rubble.*

JILL

I still dream about that day.

ALEXIS

Me, too, but we have to remember that we all got out. No one got hurt.

JILL

We almost burned up.

ALEXIS

I know. But we didn't.

JILL

How is Duane?

ALEXIS

Just a maniac in that garden, you know!

*ALEXIS and JILL continue wandering.*

JILL

Are you looking for anything at this site?

ALEXIS

You know Duane thought there might be something here to commemorate that day, something healing. He's very spiritual and believes in talismans and things. He'll be here soon.

JILL

What do you hear from Eileen these days?

ALEXIS

Not too much, an announcement for the reading tonight.

JILL

What reading?

ALEXIS

They have a reading tonight of their new book, I thought that was why you contacted me. Why did you contact me?

JILL

Because we agreed to see each other on this day 26 years after we almost burned up.

ALEXIS

Oh. I thought Duane and I would see you both at the reading.

JILL

I didn't know about it. We have not kept in touch.

ALEXIS

What? Why? How could you not?

JILL

We didn't burn up, but we ended.

ALEXIS

Nothing ends!

JILL

Lots of things end! Everything ends!

ALEXIS

But we were all given a second chance at life that day! How could you, both of you, how could--

JILL

The universe was telling us with the fire to let it all burn.

ALEXIS

We are getting such different messages from the universe!

JILL

Why would anything be different? We hadn't changed. Nothing changes. We just repeated our patterns, even on stage that day. We were the same. The world was the same. It's still the same. Everything stays the same, the old lessons taught over and over and over and over and never learned!

ALEXIS

Just let me take you to Eileen.

JILL

You can take me to Eileen, but don't ask me to hopeful! Please. I can't bear it.

*ALEXIS leads JILL offstage.*

*END OF PLAY*