

Ellen

a new short play

by
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First Draft

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A woman stands in the dark. It's a cavernous dark. There is an intense, cruel light on her face from somewhere away in the distance. She knows what she's there for. We do not. We can only guess or surmise. She faces it with the strength and integrity she has. She's terrified and strong.

LADY

I don't know. I don't know how to explain it for you. I'm not going to be fucking smart for you. You don't see my fucking intelligence any way. It doesn't present itself to you. You're too ignorant to see it.

Silence.

LADY

How do you want me to start? You want me to kiss you? You want me to fucking dab? Take my shoes off and settle in on your couch. Pull my feet up under my ass, and sit there. Like a cat. Fucking wait. You like my ass, or are you just looking at my teeth?

She laughs.

LADY

I fucking hate you. I hate your fucking nose. Your lips. Your clipped nails. I hate the food you eat. Your shoes. Your wool pants. I don't want to pretend. I won't pretend. I hate being hopeful. You like us hopeful. I won't be hopeful for you.

Silence.

LADY

I'm 144445623-564738. That's not my name though. My name's Ellen. Ellen Louise after my grandmother. I hated that name as kid. Growing up. It was so long and Southern. I'd make up other names. I'd hear a name on the bus and run it as my own. Roll the sound of it in my mouth. Go to a store, try it out on someone. See how their eyes changed when I said it. I wanted my name to be powerful. Like an ocean. To represent the sun or the fucking movement of a planet. I wanted to it to hurt your ears when you heard it, even if I said it gentle.

She stands in silence.

LADY

I gave birth to six kids. Two by my husband. Four here. I named everyone one of them. They heard their name. I sounded it out in their ear, before you'd take them from me. I named them after constellations. Orion. Aries. Cygnus. Ursa Major the bear. I know two of them are dead. I think one of them is watching me right now.

I hope they know who they are. That they came from me. That their strength came from Ellen Louise and Thom Thom. My mother Mattie Louise. My Aunt Viola. My father.

She stands. She knows she's almost out of time.

LADY

I'm gonna...I'm gonna say a list now. I'm gonna list what I remember. What I love. I want you to hear it. What you didn't take away from me.

She stands.

LADY

Words. Snow. Pajamas. 3 a.m. Clean sheets. Iced tea. Iced tea and lemonade. A fire siren. Cicadas. Gas lamps. Black and white movies. Marilyn Monroe. Old movies. Candy bars at gas stations. Peonies. Painted toes. Blackberries. Shoes. Red shoes. Patent leather. A light shoe with a small leather strap at the back and a heel. Bowling. Waterfalls. Linen. Music from our neighbors' yard. Dancing. A man holding you under your ass. Close and strong. Close to him. Your head turned to the side. Pressed to his chest. His heartbeat.

A beat.

LADY

I got...I got so many of those. Inside me. When you....shoot me. Or.... They're going fall out of me. Like fucking bees.

She breathes.

LADY

I defy you. In death I'll defy you. When you close your eyes I'll be sitting in the dark off to the side, with a book, waiting. Even after you're gone. I'll still be there. You'll never get rid of me.

Silence.

LADY

My grandma used to sing me a song. She'd rub my head and my hair. Use a cold cloth on my face. I'd hold the skin on her arm. Pinch it between my fingers.

She quietly begins to sing John Prine's *Angel From Montgomery*

LADY

I am an old woman named after my mother
My old man is another child that's grown old

If dreams were lightning thunder was desire
This old house would have burnt down a long time ago
Make me an angel that flies from Montgom'ry
Make me a poster of an old rodeo
Just give me one thing that I can hold on to
To believe in this living is just a hard way to go.

Slow fade as she continues to sing, strong and defiant,
ready.

The end.