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Dramatic Publishing

THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN

**A Drama
by
NANCY KIEFER**



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN)

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THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN is a work of fiction and does not attempt to present DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder, formerly Multiple Personality Disorder) in a totally realistic manner. The playwright has taken some artistic liberties in the portrayal of the manifestations of the disorder.

Any resemblance between real persons and the characters in this play is purely coincidental and not intended by the playwright.

to Lauren

THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN

A Drama in Two Acts
For Two Men and Four Women

CHARACTERS

JANE ELLEN WHITMAN . . . a 19-year-old multiple personality;
shy, polite, introverted, articulate, and has no conscious
knowledge of the personality of Janie

The Personalities

JANIE friendly, outgoing, aggressive, often rude and
outspoken

NOBODY a catatonic, zombie-like individual who is the
recipient of the father's sexual abuse

JANE WHITMAN the final personality

THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN

FRANK WHITMAN her father; in his 40s

DARLA WHITMAN her mother; in her 30s

MAUREEN MCCALL the Whitman's landlady and next
door neighbor; a school teacher in her 50s

JOHNNY ARCHER . . Darla's lover; a delivery man in his 30s

ANITA LLOYD Maureen's cousin; in her 50s

SCENE:

A small town in Ohio. On stage is the backyard and back porch of the McCall house and the kitchen, back porch, and backyard of the Whitman house.

TIME:

Early summer, 1935.

THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN, winner of the 1994 Michele Renee Gildersleeve Playwriting Award, held its world premiere at the Mapleleaf Theatre (at the Grand River Vineyard), Cleveland, Ohio, November, 1994, with the following artists:

Jane Ellen Whitman Alicea Layne
Darla Whitman Vick E. Kilpatrick
Maureen McCall Yvonne Pilarczyk
Frank Whitman Bobby Kilpatrick
Johnny Archer Mike Breeze
Anita Lloyd Laura Moore

Stage Direction and Design Steve Ritchey
Costumes Yvonne Pilarczyk
Stage Manager Gina Calabrese

MAUREEN. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Whitman, I have told him all those things.

DARLA. Well, tell 'im one more thing then. Tell 'im that she acted peculiar *long* before she hit 'er head and forgot how to read and write.

MAUREEN. I've already told him that, too.

DARLA. ...and he thinks he can help her, huh?

MAUREEN. He's willing to try. Please let me take her to Columbus, Mrs. Whitman. Your daughter is a brilliant young woman and certainly she's worth trying to help.

DARLA. ...well, maybe. But I got to figure out a way to do it without Frank knowin'.

MAUREEN. Thank you, Mrs. Whitman.

DARLA. ...you *sure* he ain't gonna send her away?

MAUREEN. He only wants to talk to her.

DARLA. About what?

MAUREEN. I suppose about herself. He needs to know everything he can about her.

DARLA. You know, I kinda feel sorry for that doctor. I got a feelin' he's gonna wish he never set eyes on Jane Ellen. He may be bitin' off more than he can chew.

MAUREEN. Why do you say that?

DARLA. 'Cause she's so *damn* crazy. You never know what she's gonna say or how she's gonna act or what she'll remember. I'll give you an example, but this is just between you and me, you understand that?

MAUREEN. Yes.

DARLA. Frank's brother visited us once. Frank wasn't home. He was over in Malvern, doin' God knows what, but I let 'is brother stay the night. Steve, that's Frank's brother, told me some pretty scary stuff. He got to drinkin' like all them Whitmans do and 'is tongue got loose, and he said that he thought...well, he thought that maybe Frank killed their pa.

MAUREEN. Does Jane Ellen knows this?

DARLA. Ya can't tell *what* Jane Ellen knows! That's what's so frustratin' about that girl. She heard the story, but the next day when I asked 'er about it, she acted like she didn't know what I was talkin' about.

MAUREEN. Do you think it was a true story?

DARLA. Coulda been. Frank's pa was a *mean* bastard. Frank was the youngest a' twelve boys, and Steve told us that when the old man drank, he used to beat the hell outta them boys and their ma. Once when Frank was seven years old, he saw the old man knock his mother so hard against the side of 'er head that she passed out. When she woke up, she was never right again. She died that same year, from bleedin' in the brain. Frank was seven then. The old man turned up dead in a ditch when Frank was sixteen.

MAUREEN. Was your husband arrested?

DARLA. *All* them boys was arrested! Christ, they *all* had a motive! But they all got let go. I don't know if the cops ever convicted anybody for the murder, but Frank's brother was sure he done it. After their ma died, Frank spent the next nine years talkin' about how he was gonna kill that old man.

MAUREEN. How old was Jane Ellen when she heard this story?

DARLA. Oh...maybe thirteen or fourteen. Now, somedays to hear 'er talk, you'd think she *likes* 'er pa 'cause he buys, or more likely *steals*, her presents and he says he loves 'er and he calls 'er his Lady Jane. Then ten minutes later she acts terrified of 'im, runs away and hides. And then she'll hiss into my face that I'm married to a murderer and if I had any decency I'd go to the cops and turn Frank in for killin' his father. Now, I know I ain't no rose. And I ain't never gonna win no Mother of the Year Award, but Jane

Ellen's the only kid I got. I know she's nuts and I can't imagine this doctor friend a' yours givin' her no clean bill a' health and sendin' 'er on 'er merry way. I'm scared to *death* that my only child is gonna be locked up, Miss McCall!

MAUREEN. Have you changed your mind about allowing her to see a psychiatrist?

DARLA. No. I just got to think about it some more. I ain't sure it's the right thing to do. (*Hesitates; looks at MAUREEN.*)...if I ask you a question, you won't think I'm stupid, will ya?

MAUREEN. No. Certainly not.

DARLA. Well...sometimes I think that maybe Jane Ellen is...

MAUREEN. Is what, Mrs. Whitman?

DARLA. I feel foolish sayin' it, but sometimes I think she might have the devil inside a' her.

MAUREEN (*stunned*). Surely you don't believe in demonic possession?

DARLA. See! I *knew* you'd think I was stupid.

MAUREEN. I don't think you're stupid, Mrs. Whitman. But belief in possession was popular during the Middle Ages. We are living in the 20th Century.

DARLA. Did ya ever see her *change*, Miss McCall? Did ya ever see 'er lower 'er head and close 'er eyes...then she looks up, all confused, like she ain't sure who she is or where she's at...and then some other voice comes outta her mouth? Her eyes are different. Her face looks like another person. One minute I'm her ma...and then I'm *Darla* and I'm a slut. Did ya ever see that happen?

MAUREEN. I've seen her change. It happened in school several times over the years.

DARLA. It makes my skin crawl. I thought about takin' 'er to a Catholic priest once. They still do them exorcisms, don't they?

MAUREEN. ...she's not possessed.

DARLA. She ain't got the devil in 'er, and she ain't crazy, huh, Miss McCall? Then what's the matter with 'er? What the hell's the matter with 'er? You tell me.

MAUREEN. I don't know, Mrs. Whitman.

SCENE THREE

SETTING: *The kitchen, porch and backyard of the Whitman house.*

AT RISE: *It is the next day. Enter ANITA and MAUREEN.*

ANITA (*looks critically at the house*). ...well, it ain't improved any over the years.

MAUREEN (*softly*). Not with these tenants. (*Knocks on the door.*) Mrs. Whitman? Jane Ellen? You home? (*There is no response.*)

ANITA (*picks up some garbage and tosses it in a trash can*). Lord! This place was no palace when I lived here, but it was *clean*. Why don't they at least pick up the yard?

MAUREEN. I suppose that would be asking too much of them. The only reason I let them stay is because of their daughter.

ANITA. The teacher's pet, huh?

MAUREEN. Yes, but it's more than that. I'm afraid of what might happen to her if she didn't live right next door to me. Did I tell you I think she's a genius?

ANITA. You said she was smart.

MAUREEN. She's more than smart. She creative and artistic.
When you combine smart with creative and artistic, you get *genius*.

(Enter DARLA and JANE ELLEN.)

ANITA. ...speak a' the devil.

MAUREEN. Mrs. Whitman and Jane Ellen, this is my cousin,
Anita Lloyd.

DARLA. How do ya do, Miss Lloyd.

ANITA. It's *Mrs.* Lloyd and you can call me Anita.

DARLA. You can call me Darla.

JANE ELLEN *(standing off by herself, meekly)*. ...how do
you do, Mrs. Lloyd?

MAUREEN. Anita didn't tell me in her letter that she got
married. She wanted to save it as a surprise.

DARLA. Well, congratulations... 'cept that I ain't real keen
on the institution a' marriage myself. Is your husband with
ya?

ANITA. No, he ain't. He's down south, sellin' off what's left
of the business we worked for.

DARLA. I been on my feet all day and all I wanna do right
now is sit myself down on these stairs here and have a
beer. You drink beer, Anita?

ANITA. Sure, sometimes.

DARLA *(takes a dime out of her pocket and a pail from the
porch; hands them to JANE ELLEN)*. Jane Ellen, run over
to the Silver Sun and get us some beer from Mike.

ANITA. No, let me buy. *(Takes the money from JANE
ELLEN's hand, gives it back to DARLA, and gives JANE
ELLEN some money.)* And get me a pack a' Chesterfields,
will ya, honey?

JANE ELLEN. ...okay. (*Exits.*)

DARLA. I hear you used to live in our house.

ANITA. I grew up here, right next to Maureen.

MAUREEN. I've never left this town except to go away to school. And Anita's been all over the country.

ANITA. Not quite, but as far west as Oklahoma.

DARLA. How'd you get to travel so much?

ANITA. My husband and I worked for a carnival.

DARLA. A carnival? That musta been a hoot!

ANITA. ...let's just say it was an *interestin'* experience, and one I don't care to repeat.

DARLA. That where you met your husband?

ANITA. Yeah, it was. He was the general manager and I met 'im in a little town in Missouri where I used to live when the show passed through. We fell in love and got married a week later.

DARLA. How long ago was that?

ANITA. Oh, about four years ago.

MAUREEN (*laughs*). Imagine a woman your age getting married! And only knowing the bridegroom for one week!

ANITA. It was Ray's first time, too. Neither one of us ever fell in love before, I guess.

(Enter JANIE with beer and cigarettes; tosses the Chesterfields to ANITA.)

JANIE. There ya are, Mrs. Lloyd. I'll get some glasses. (*Exits into house.*)

ANITA (*surprised*). She's perked up some.

DARLA. Yeah...she has a tendency to do that.

MAUREEN. So his name is Ray?

ANITA. Raymond Joseph Lloyd. Nicest fella in the world. Tall guy with a full beard who smokes cigars and has a personality like Santa Claus.

(JANIE comes out with glasses; pours and distributes beer as she smokes a Lucky Strike.)

JANIE. Who's like Santa Claus?

DARLA. Anita's husband. Don't sound much like your pa, does it, Jane Ellen? She met 'im at a travelin' carnival.

MAUREEN. When did you start drinking beer, Jane Ellen?

JANIE. I'm gonna be twenty next week, Miss McCall. I'm old enough. *(To ANITA.)* I love carnivals. The Catholic church in Malvern always has one in the summer, and I ain't never missed it. After you got married, did ya travel around?

ANITA. Sure did.

JANIE *(fascinated)*. What was your job?

MAUREEN *(laughs)*. I was just about to ask you that myself, Anita, but I was afraid to.

ANITA *(laughs)*. Why? You think I *disgraced* myself by puttin' on a beard and pretendin' to be a bearded lady, or somethin'?

MAUREEN. ...or something worse.

ANITA. No! I was never part of the *entertainment*. I didn't have any talent, which isn't to say that any a' them did, neither. No, I helped Ray keep the books. Sometimes I sold tickets. Nothin' glamorous. We had a merry-go-round and a ferris wheel and a whole bunch a' game booths, several rigged. No matter how hard you hit them milk bottles, they was *never* gonna fall over! Lots a' gamblin' tents and bootleggin', too. Fortune tellers, weight and age guessers. Candy apples and lemonade. Pretty typical as carnivals go.

JANIE. Did ya have a sideshow with freaks?

ANITA. Any self-respectin' carnival is gonna have a sideshow with freaks, honey. We had us a couple a' strong men, a bearded lady, and she was the *real* thing. Her whole body was covered with hair. And we had a midget with no arms and a Chinese fella who had another head growin' outta his shoulder. He was the star attraction. The Two-Headed Chinaman. Ray paid 'im twenty-five dollars a week.

JANIE (*intrigued*). Was it alive? The head?

ANITA. No, it didn't have no brain or nothin'. It was a *weird* lookin' thing. I couldn't eat at the same table with him 'less he covered it up.

JANIE. What else did ya have?

ANITA. Oh, the usual assortment. A fat lady. A snake lady. Head of a woman and the body of a snake. Of course, she was a fake. Did it with mirrors, and it wasn't even a good fake. People used to ask for their nickel back. An alligator boy. Just some poor kid with a *real* bad skin condition. And we had a tattooed lady, too. She was my favorite. Her name was Emily Farris and she was billed as *The Illustrated Woman*.

JANIE. Was she tattooed all over?

ANITA. All except for her face, hands, and her neck. And a few private parts, if ya know what I mean.

MAUREEN. That must have hurt a great deal, getting tattoos all over one's body. I understand the process is quite painful.

ANITA. I asked Emily about that once and she told me she didn't feel a thing. She said she had what ya call mind-over-matter powers and she could just turn off the pain when she wanted to.

DARLA. Really? What kinda tattoos did she have?

ANITA. Now, that's what made Emily different. She didn't have conventional tattoos. She went all the way to Europe to have a famous artist do 'er tattoos. They was all famous women in history. (*She touches various parts of her body as she speaks.*) On her left shoulder she had Cleopatra and Venus de Milo on the right. Her chest and stomach had the Mona Lisa, Helen a' Troy and the Queen a' Sheba. Her back was all queens. Queen Elizabeth, Brünnhilde, Marie Antoinette about to get 'er head cut off, and Catherine the Great a' Russia.

JANIE. Who'd she have on her legs?

ANITA. ...let me think...it's been a while since I seen her. She had mythology ladies on her legs, like Aphrodite and the Muses and Medusa and a bunch a' them love goddess-types.

MAUREEN. ...good heavens. What about her arms?

ANITA. Well, one arm had all these Shakespeare ladies on it. Juliet up there on 'er balcony and Lady Macbeth, lookin' into 'er bloody hand. And them witches, too. And the other arm had Biblical woman, like Salome doin' 'er dance, Jezebel, Bathsheba, Delilah cuttin' off Samson's hair.

DARLA. She have anybody on her behind?

ANITA (*laughs*). I never seen her behind, so I don't know, but I kinda doubt it. Emily was too proper for that. Besides, we had dancin' girls who'd shimmy around dressed for a nickel, and shimmy around *undressed* for a quarter in the back tent. Gentlemen only.

MAUREEN. She sounds like a very...*unconventional* woman.

ANITA. Ain't that the truth. She was a *big* woman. Big-boned. She stood a little over six feet tall and she lifted weights every day with the Scaravilla Brothers. They was the strong men. Emily was a nice lady. She had some education, she didn't drink, she didn't smoke, never said too

much. And never made any trouble...but she was the kinda person it was better to have as a friend than an enemy.

DARLA. What happened to 'er after the carnival went outta business?

ANITA. Well, that's a story. I suppose she was one a' the reasons we folded up. Ya see, when the show in Oklahoma City ended, we turned around and headed back east. A couple days after we was on the road, somebody found a little stowaway hidin' in one a' the trucks. A little girl. Told us 'er name was Ruthie and she was seven years old. Dirty as all hell, covered with sores, starvin', wearin' rags. Well, I ain't never seen a woman take to a child like Emily Farris took to Ruthie. Grabbed 'er up in her arms, washed 'er, fed 'er, found 'er some nice clothes, and let 'er live in the trailer with 'er.

One night Emily came to my trailer and said she wanted to talk to me. I remember feelin' *honored* 'cause Emily wasn't too outgoin' with people. And she told me somethin' about 'erself that nobody else knew. She told me that when she was nineteen, she had a baby girl...stillborn. She didn't mention no husband, so I guessed she wasn't married at the time. She told me that she was so grief-stricken that it took all night before she'd release the body a' that baby to the nuns at the hospital. And it was after that that she went to Europe, got all tattooed, and joined the carnival. She said she *had* to do somethin' crazy like that so she could stop thinkin' about that dead baby layin' in her arms. And then she said to me, "You know what I named my child? Ruth...I named 'er Ruth." And then she asked me if I thought Ray would let 'er keep Ruthie, let 'er travel with us. I said, "Emily, don't people usually say yes to you, for God's sake? Who's gonna say *no* to a six-foot

woman with twelve-inch biceps?" Besides, Ray's an old pussycat and of course he said yes.

And so Ruthie and Emily became a team and I ain't ever known a woman who was a better mother than Emily Farris. She couldn'ta loved that little girl no more if she had been her own natural child. She taught her to read and write and was in the process of findin' a lawyer as soon as we got to St. Louis so she could start adoptin' procedures. She was savin' all 'er money for that.

But you know how it is. Sometimes when things seem to be goin' *so* good, all of a sudden they turn *so* goddamn bad. There was this fella named Milton Russo. He did general labor, puttin' up tents, loadin' trucks, stuff like that. Nasty kinda person. He drank a lot, and gambled, and did quite a bit a' womanizin', too, although I never figured out how he got the women since he was uglier than dirt.

DARLA (*laughs*). He musta been related to my husband, Frank!

ANITA. Well, anyway, he took a likin' to Ruthie. Started followin' 'er around, botherin' 'er, starin' at 'er all the time. One night after we had closed, Emily went back to 'er trailer and Ruthie wasn't in bed. A bunch of us went lookin' for 'er in the woods where we were camped. We looked for hours, but nobody could find 'er. Around three in the mornin' a group of us were talkin' about goin' to report 'er missin' to the police when the poor little thing comes runnin' outta the woods, crying and bleedin'. About the same time, some a' the men found Russo, passed out drunk, and were haulin' 'im into camp. Eventually Ray got Ruthie calmed down and got 'er to talk. Seems Russo kid-

napped 'er right outta her bed, took 'er off into the woods, beat 'er up real bad and raped 'er.

MAUREEN. ...oh, my dear God.

ANITA. By that time, everybody workin' for the show was outside. That was about seventy people. And right in front a' those seventy people, Emily Farris went into her trailer, came out with a *big* butcher knife and went straight for Russo. She said, "You son of a bitch, you raped my little girl, and now I'm gonna send you straight to hell." Then she stabbed 'im in the heart, only Ray grabbed her arm so the blade didn't go all the way in and kill 'im. And I ain't kiddin' you when I say that it took *eight* grown men to get Emily Farris offa that man. She knocked 'im to the ground and was chokin' 'im with those big hands a' hers and did a lot a' damage before Ray, the Scaravilla Brothers, and five more men, all of 'em big fellas, could get control a' that woman.

DARLA. What happened to Russo? Did he die?

ANITA. Nope, but he had a stab wound to the chest, a broken neck, and about fifty busted bones in his body. When he was fit, he went to trial and got convicted. Last I heard he was still in prison. I hope to God they keep 'im there.

MAUREEN. What about Emily Farris?

ANITA. She got arrested for attempted murder and convicted, but she didn't do too much time. They let 'er out early on good behavior and since the circumstances were rather *extenuatin'*. Last I heard, her and Ruthie moved out to San Diego where Emily had some family. But the papers got hold a' the story and gave us a real bad reputation, sayin' nobody was safe there and we *hired rapists*. And the economy was only gettin' worse, so eventually the owners let the whole thing go. Laid everybody off and told Ray to sell the property for what he could get for it.

MAUREEN. That's quite a story, Anita.

ANITA. Ain't it though? You're a writer, ain't you, Maureen?

MAUREEN. Where did you get that idea?

ANITA. Well, ya teach English, don't ya?

MAUREEN. Among other things, but that hardly makes me a writer.

ANITA. The whole time I was travelin' around with that crazy carnival, I was keepin' a journal. I got hundreds a' pages, and there's lots a' good stories in those pages. Once me and Ray get settled down in Chicago, I want you to visit us. And I want you to write a book with me.

MAUREEN. A book? A *whole* book?

ANITA. I got enough material for ten books.

MAUREEN. I appreciate your confidence in me, Anita, but I don't think I'm up to that. (*Looks at JANE ELLEN.*) Jane Ellen's an excellent writer. She writes poems and stories and she's even written for the newspaper. Maybe she can write your book.

DARLA. But Jane Ellen can't read or—

MAUREEN (*cuts her off*). When she's ready, perhaps she can.

(*JANIE transforms into JANE ELLEN.*)

JANE ELLEN. ...write what book, Miss McCall?

MAUREEN. The book Anita wants written about her life with the carnival.

JANE ELLEN (*confused*). ...carnival?

DARLA (*embarrassed*). Yeah, the carnival we've been talkin' about for the last half an hour.

JANE ELLEN (*baffled*). ...oh.

MAUREEN. Well, never mind about that now. There's plenty of time to decide who'll write this next great American novel!

ANITA. It ain't no novel! It's all the truth.

MAUREEN. I'm sure it is. Well, Anita and I have a dinner date and we'll be late if we don't get moving.

DARLA. It was real nice meetin' you, Anita.

ANITA. You, too. Good-bye now, ladies. You take care, Jane Ellen. And you let me know if you wanna help me with the book. It'll be a *good* one. Raise a lot a' eyebrows. Maybe even make us some money in the process. (*Exit MAUREEN and ANITA.*)

DARLA (*looks after them, and does not notice JANE ELLEN disassociating*). Now, don't that lady have an interestin' life, huh? When I was a little girl, I wanted to join a carnival.

JANE ELLEN (*clearly disturbed*). ...little girl?...carnival?

DARLA. Yeah. I wanted to wear them fancy, sparkly clothes and ride on an elephant! Maybe it ain't too late, huh? What do ya say, Jane Ellen? We could just up and leave. Travel around the country and have us some fun.

JANE ELLEN (*clearly disturbed*). ...little girl...carnival...

(JANE ELLEN transforms into NOBODY; goes to the side of the porch steps, slumps to the ground, wraps her arms around herself, rocking back and forth and moaning.)

DARLA. What in the name a' Christ is wrong with you, Jane Ellen? Get up! Go in the house! You want the neighbors seein' you doin' that?! (*DARLA grabs at her, but JANE ELLEN pushes her away and starts to cry.*) Why you doin' this? Why you actin' this way?

(Enter MAUREEN.)

MAUREEN. What's wrong, Mrs. Whitman?

DARLA. I don't know. As soon as you left, Jane Ellen...

MAUREEN (*goes to JANE ELLEN, kneels down beside her and wraps her in her arms*). It's all right, sweetheart. It's all right. Just calm down now...relax...and everything'll be all right.

DARLA (*upset*). Imagine a woman her age actin' like that. She's gonna be twenty years old. Why's she doin' that?

MAUREEN. I don't know, Mrs. Whitman. That's why for years now I've been pleading with you to let me help her.

NOBODY. ...five...

MAUREEN. Five? What do you mean, Jane Ellen?

NOBODY. ...five...I'm five.

DARLA (*mystified*). ...five? What the hell she's sayin'?

MAUREEN. I think she's saying that she's five years old, not twenty.

DARLA. You still gonna tell me that doctor in Columbus ain't gonna lock her up?!

MAUREEN. She's not *insane*, Mrs. Whitman. I know she's not. (*Continues to rock JANE ELLEN in her arms.*)

END OF ACT ONE