1988: Eric Lives With Martin and Jenny

A chamber opera in one act

Music by Robert Ely

Libretto by Peter Scott-Presland

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Cast

Eric  A gay man in his early 30s. Smart casual – check shirt, jeans, wispy moustache

Dame Jill Knight  A formidable MP, perm like a helmet, twinset and pearls, around 60.

Speaker  Voice off; spoken

Setting

Bare stage with one wooden chair; and a screen on which to project a slide show. ERIC will talk directly to the audience, DAME JILL in a spotlight at the rear of the stage will grandstand as if addressing a large meeting.

The slides and the order in which they appear is so important that I have introduced them into the text where they are referred to.

Orchestration

This is the most intimate opera of the sequence, essentially a monologue, and might benefit from solo piano accompaniment
The Script

[Bare stage]

VOICE OFF: [spoken] The Honorable Member for Birmingham Edgbaston

DAME JILL: [over hubbub of cheers and boos]
Thank you Mister Speaker
Many parents are concerned
About the books in schools
So-called sex education books
Which may corrupt our children
There is shocking evidence in abundance
That children are being encouraged
To be gay and lesbian
Some as young as five years old
This is paid for out of the rates
Against the wishes of the parents.

There is a book called *The Milkman’s on his Way.*
I will not shock the House by quoting from it
It shows intercourse in sordid detail
Between an adolescent boy
And his adult male lover.

Haringey Council made a video,
*How to become a lesbian in thirty five minutes.*
It was shown to mentally handicapped girls

There has been a great deal of protest
About *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin,*
It shows a little girl of six
In bed with her father and his male lover
Both of whom are naked

INSERT SLIDE:
They all live happily together
It is terrifying to me
That local councils have been promoting
That kind of stuff
There is a pile of filth
All paid for by the rates

[Spotlight fades. Lights more generally on ERIC]

ERIC: There I am on the right in the photo
Martin on the left with the skinny arms
I hate that photo.
It makes me look a porker
With that double chin

You can tell we’re Danish
We eat crispbread in bed;
And Jenny wants some jam.
She’s always wanting something
She’s a pain in the butt
I hate that girl
It’s all her fault
We’re in this mess now

I was an average young gay man
In Copenhagen
Cruising round the bars
The Intime, and the Centralhjornet
The Cozy Bar and the Masken

I didn’t have a moustache in those days
I was young and cute
And everyone wanted a piece of me
I never went home alone

Then I met Martin
Who looked deep in my eyes
And talked of love

INSERT SLIDE:
He was so squeaky clean and certain
He offered calm where I had known
Only adrenalin and inconstancy.

At first he didn’t tell me he was married
But when I found out, that was cool
I was content to be the other man
In a triangle with a bisexual
That was very hip, that was Danish.
It left me time to pick up other men
And go to backrooms

I loved the bushes in the Orstedsparken
The playroom and the darkroom
At the SLM
The voices whispering dirty in your ear
The smell of sweat and cum and baby oil
Hard, hard bodies you could only feel, not see,
Then back to Martin

But Karen threw a spanner in the works,
The bitch, by spawning.

INSERT SLIDE:
I think she came off the pill
Without telling him
To get herself pregnant
It’s what some women do
To get what they want

That isn’t Karen in the picture
She’s played by some model
By the time we took the pictures for the book
The real Karen had done a bunk

I couldn’t meet with Martin any more
Not the way I had before
He had to babysit
He had to go to clinics
He had to look for kindergartens
Always something
For the stupid brat

Still I saw him of course
Cos no-one gave him blow jobs like I did
He wasn’t going to give up fun completely
For the sake of any child
We jogged along
I accommodated

I have always been accommodating
In bed and out of it

But Karen hadn’t wrecked my life enough
She had to want a divorce
And no, she didn’t want the wretched girl

Jenny
Did I say her name was Jenny?
Cutsie-wootsie Jenny
It makes me sick

Why Karen couldn’t take the girl
Is quite beyond me
That’s what women do, isn’t it?
Bring up children
Juggle with a home and a career
And everyone admires how they cope

But no, Karen had to get a job
Designing Lego bricks
And move to Billund.

She took him to the cleaners
In the settlement
The house and everything
Which she sold
Selfishly she wouldn’t take the girl
Left Martin with the baby
Literally.

He asked if he could move in
He had no place of his own.
And me, I’m soft as shit, so I said yes
That was fine for a year or two
I still got out to the lake and the forest
At Charlottenlund
Where there’s a lot of action;
The sauna at the Copenhagen Gay Centre

I have a high sex drive,
I can’t help it.
So what?

But Martin starts to worry
We are two gay parents
We have to set an example
And if we are an example
We must be twice as good
As well-behaved, as patient,
As any straights
I am not a gay parent
I did not choose this
Did Martin ask me?
Did Karen ask me?
No they did not

[ERIC brings a washing line across the stage, sets it up. He then gets a basket of clean washing – Jenny’s little clothes – and starts to peg them out.]

INSERT SLIDE:
You see? How I’m reduced
To being a good little housewife
You would not believe
How many clothes that girl gets through

Cack in her knickers
Jam down her tank top
Rolling in the dirt
Unbelievable.

Then along comes Martin’s friend
Suzanne Bosche
“Let me write a book about you,”
She said.
“We’ll show the world
How gay men can be as normal
As everybody else”

I don’t want to be normal!

I did not come out,
I did not struggle for my liberation
So I could be like all the rest

Whatever else they say
Liberation is about sex
The more sex you can have
The more liberated you are

But Suzanne persuaded Martin
And we posed for stupid pictures

INSERT SLIDE:

Jenny loved to pose for pictures
Proper little diva, a real madam
Always the centre of attention

When me and Martin wanted sex in the morning
- And I love sex in the morning -
She was always pushing in.

INSERT SLIDE:
Here we are, another photo,
Waking up, getting excited -
And it’s ‘Make my breakfast Daddy’
‘Come and play with me Daddy’
No thought for anybody else

You can’t see it in the picture
But underneath that duvet
I have a massive erection.

But Susanne’s story
Was so boring and bourgeois
Going to the launderette
Mowing the lawn
Tending the garden

She was obsessed potatoes,
Growing them, digging them up,
Eating them – ‘Mmmm!’
She even had us
Giving potatoes as presents
Dull, dull, dull, dull, dull

The most exciting thing I ever did
Was mend a puncture in a tyre
On my bicycle
See? She can’t even let us cook a meal
Without she wants to join in
And let me tell you, her cooking’s shit!
Martin’s trying to make
Spaghetti Bolognese
And what does she put in it?
Sugar sprinkles!

Talking of presents
When it was my birthday
All I wanted was to get wrecked
A bit of spliff, a bottle of good wine.
But no, we had to have
Jellies, fairy cakes and candles
Cocoa and fizzy drinks
Because she was there -
Not even a bottle of Carlsberg!
It’s not Jenny’s birthday,  
It’s mine for Christ sake!  
And if I want to get wrecked  
I bloody well will.  

Of course we rowed about it,  
Martin and me,  
But thanks to Jenny  
We couldn’t even row properly.  
From the pictures  
You’d think I was asking  
‘One lump or two’  
And of course the little limpet  
Has to get in it as well.  
Look at her in the middle -  
Poisonous poppet
[Pause, looks at picture]

Shame, cos Martin has a really nice arse
Not that I’ve had it for months.

The trouble with that Suzanne Bosche
Who wrote our book,
Everything has to be sweetness and light
Even her queer bashers are middle class.
Real gays get skinheads
With swastikas and tattoos
Bricks through the windows
DMs in the guts
That would show young Jenny
What it’s all about.
But no, we get Miss Judi Dench
Whose worst insult is ‘Oh, you gays!
What on earth do you think you’re playing at?
Why don’t you stay at home
So the rest of us don’t have to see you?’
Obviously we’re terrified - NOT!
Look at me! I’m bloody smiling!

Whoever met a queerbasher
Old enough to be their mother?

[He has finished putting out the washing. He looks at it, then comes to a decision and tears the washing off the line.]

To hell with it, I’ve had enough.
I want a normal life.
A normal gay life
With a high disposable income
To spend on clothes
And going to clubs
And fashionable restaurants
A gym membership
And sex toys
A small mews house that’s
A neglected Georgian gem
I can restore myself
In an area I will help to gentrify
I want to get bladdered on a Friday
Dance to six A.M.
Chill out in some calm café
Where drugs may be available
Through a long lazy afternoon
With Carly Simon and Brian Eno

We were happy as we were
Martin and me
We had a life of our own
Before that wretched Jenny
Came to live with us

I have the answer
If Jenny could come to live
Then Jenny can go
Jenny can go Now!

To hell with sentiment.
Who is she to come into my life
Uninvited
Take it over, turn me into
Someone I am not
I have to destroy her
This terrifying tot
To save myself

[calls offstage] Jenny! Where are you, darling?
Uncle Eric’s got a game for you

[He unties the washing line, and coils it in his hand. He exits. The following lines are delivered offstage]

Would you like a little game?
A little bondage game?
Perhaps a little mild asphyxiation...

[The music rises to a climax as ERIC strangles JENNY in the washing line. The music suggests an intense struggle, with JENNY gradually getting weaker, and the struggle dying away. ERIC staggers back onto the stage]
with a large - very large - doll caught round the neck in the washing line. He raises it above his head suspended in the rope.]

LIBERATION!

BLACKOUT