**BREAKING EQUIPOISE**

A short play

By Ella Moss

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\*Inspired by the song, “The Sea Is A Good Place To Think Of The Future,” by Los Campensinos

TW: Talk of serious topics and existential dread

Cast of Characters

LORALEI MORTE:           A young woman, early twenties, who doesn’t know herself. She’s opinionated and likes to make things more significant than they really are, but she struggles staying true to herself. She is very pretty and likeable, but doesn’t like herself. She strives to please.

IPHIS KENWARD:           A young man, early twenties. A hard-worker with big dreams. He cares immensely about people but doesn’t like to show it in an overly affectionate way. He worries a lot about everything, but doesn’t come off as the type.

Place

Falmouth, England

Time

2010

ACT 1

Scene 1

Setting:                                A beach littered with rocks of all shapes and sizes. Sparse sunspots dance on the ground like hope escaping through the wall of clouds.

At Rise:                               Waves crash in the background, and the thrumming of a beating heart overpowers every other noise, growing louder, but not faster, as it is slightly fast already. The lights brighten to reveal the silhouette of IPHIS. He is subtly, with practiced conciliation, going through breathing exercises. When he finishes he looks up and around, and then checks his watch. He fidgets. There’s a building tension in the theater, made possibly by the addition of percussion music. LORALEI enters from the back, and all noise shatters abruptly with her call.

LORALEI

Iphis!

*(IPHIS turns to look at her, his face contorting in a swell of mixed emotions. LORALEI half-jogs up to IPHIS, her face a radiant smile. They embrace like old friends who haven’t seen each other in years, because they haven’t.)*

*(Excitedly)* Oh, god, how long’s it been? Two years?

*(IPHIS is still standing, his face a wall of shock. He snaps out of it.)*

IPHIS

Yes! *(Still in a kind of trance)* Loralei, holy shit, it feels longer than that.

LORALEI

I know right? I can’t believe you’re really here.

IPHIS

Me neither.

*(A beat.)*

Oh, but the train was terrible—ohmygod, there was this lady with this tinydog and she carried it in her *bag* and it wouldn’t stop yapping the entireride.

LORALEI

*(Laughing)* Oh no… God, I haven’t been on the train in years. I forgot how daft people can be.

IPHIS

Really? You’ve actually just never left Falmouth?

LORALEI

Nah. I mean, it’s treated us pretty well, why would I want to leave?

IPHIS

I mean, “pretty well” might be an over-statement, but—

*(IPHIS looks out to the water.)*

It is beautiful, innit?

LORALEI

Well, how’ve you been?

IPHIS

I’ve been—really, really good actually. You?

LORALEI

I—yeah, the same.

*(IPHIS stares at LORALEI for a moment.)*

Iphis?

IPHIS

Oh god, sorry, I’m just taking you in, you’ve changed so much.

LORALEI

Really? I don’t think you have at all.

IPHIS

Have you seen anyone else? Pat? Benny? Michael?

LORALEI

I saw Benny maybe a few months ago. I think she’s doing okay. No one else, though. You?

IPHIS

Nah. At most a phone call here and there.

LORALEI

They’ve all moved on, Iphis. I mean it’s been two *years,* they all have different lives now—and you do too! I’m the only one that’s stayed here.

IPHIS

When were we all last together—I mean, it must’ve been the going-away party?

LORALEI

Yeah, after graduation.

IPHIS

I feel so different now.

LORALEI

You’ve been in London.

IPHIS

I have.

LORALEI

How is that?

IPHIS

London?

LORALEI

Yes! Did you ever get your business degree?

IPHIS

You remember that?

LORALEI

Don’t be silly, of course, I remember. It’s all you’d ever talk about.

IPHIS

Well, you know, it’s going. It’s like a different world up there, Lora, really. You must come visit me at some point.

LORALEI

Are you sure? How will you ever find time for me? You’re so busy, it was enough to just get you to come back to Falmouth.

IPHIS

No, no, I’ll find the time. Don’t worry, I’ll bring you to London.

*(LORALEI shakes her head with a smile.)*

LORALEI

Look at you. Still making promises—dressed in your Tory clothes and everything! We never got you to loosen up, did we?

IPHIS

I guess it’s in my blood.

LORALEI

Oh, my god, have you seen—well, I’m sure you have.

IPHIS

It’s worse in London.

LORALEI

The fact that Cameron thinks he can *blame* Labour—

IPHIS

When it’s Brown’s responsibility? I know.

LORALEI

Exactly! And the Conservatives think they can do better when it’s their fault in the first place? It’s fucking infuriating.

IPHIS

I know! *(Shaking his head)* You’d be such a good politician, Lora, I’ve always thought so.

*(LORALEI scoffs and lightly shoves his arm.)*

LORALEI

Ohmygod, if I had to stand around with those stinking Tories all day, I’d start a proper fight. I really would. I just can’t stand them.

*(A beat.)*

Huh, I don’t know how we got there. Here, let’s sit down.

*(LORALEI leads them to a particularly large boulder on which they sit down and look out to sea.)*

IPHIS

*(Chuckles)* It’s alright, I like listening to you talk. Tell me, what’s your life like now?

LORALEI

Well, it’s certainly not as interesting as yours. I have a job as a waitress at Seven Stars.

IPHIS

Seven Stars? You’re kidding.

LORALEI

Nope. It’s still there, still going strong.

IPHIS

Wow… that brings back loads of memories… Remember we’d always sneak in the back Fridays and steal beers from Rony?

LORALEI

Yes! I literally relive it every day. Except now I’m actually legally allowed to steal the beers. Well, if it’s legal to steal.

IPHIS

Which it isn’t—

LORALEI

*(Laughing)* Piss off.

IPHIS

LORAELI

Completely hammered Completely hammered?

IPHIS

Yeah!

*(They laugh and then settle into a comfortable silence.)*

God, we were such teenagers. That was, what? Year 10?

LORALEI

*(Casually)* Yeah, back when I was still using.

IPHIS

Right after your mother—

LORALEI

Yeah.

IPHIS

Yeah.

*(A beat.)*

This is a terrible question to ask, but Lora, you’re still clean, right?

LORALEI

*(Unbothered)* Three years, six months, and roughly ten days.

*(IPHIS hums.)*

LORALEI

You know I’m learning French?

IPHIS

Really?

LORALEI

Yeah. I started to have dreams about her. How she would sing me these French lullabies while I fell asleep and it made me want to learn.

IPHIS

When did the dreams start?

LORALEI

I’ve had them off and on since it happened. Now they’re usually nice—like her singing me to sleep or something.

IPHIS

Usually?

LORALEI

Yeah.

IPHIS

How come you never told me about them before?

LORALEI

Iphis, my mother died from an allergic reaction to anesthetic. In a fucking standard procedure. Do you really expect that when I was 17 I was ready to talk about it? Let alone tell you I had dreams about it?

IPHIS

I—I guess not. I’m sorry.

*(A beat.)*

LORALEI

No—It’s okay. I’m sorry for snapping.

IPHIS

Tell me something.

LORALEI

What?

IPHIS

In French.

LORALEI

Ahm…J’étais effrayé.

IPHIS

What does it mean?

LORALEI

*(Slowly)* It means, Iphis, that I was using—

*(LORALEI glances at IPHIS pointedly.)*

In… how would you say… a hard-headed attempt—err—futile endeavor to know more than her doctors.

*(It’s silent for a little while. IPHIS studies LORALEI’s expression as she watches the waves. At some point, the clouds overcast and the sea and the ground turn grey. LORALEI shivers.)*

LORALEI

The wind really picked up didn’t it?

IPHIS

Here, are you cold?

*(IPHIS starts to take off his jacket.)*

LORALEI

No, no, no, I’m fine, really, it was just—

*(IPHIS ignores her and keeps taking off his jacket. He reaches for her wrist to bring her closer to him.)*

IPHIS

*(Suddenly)* Oh my god, Lora.

LORALEI

What is it? Are you okay?

IPHIS

No, I’m fine, it’s just your wrists, they’re so thin.

*(IPHIS knits his brows and hurriedly wraps LORALEI in his jacket.)*

*(Quickly; worriedly)* Are you still—I mean—Fuck. Are you okay?

*(LORALEI stands up and quickly moves herself away from IPHIS. She wraps herself in the jacket* *tightly.)*

Lora? Are you dieting again? Are you—

LORALEI

*(Distractedly annoyed)* Iphis, please. For god sake.

*(IPHIS stops immediately to look at LORALEI who’s large presence suddenly seems very, very small.)*

IPHIS

Hey, I’m sorry, I just—

LORALEI

I know, but Iphis, please, not now.

IPHIS

What d’you mean not now?

LORALEI

Iphis, this is supposed to be us hanging out. You haven’t seen me for two years! Let’s get back to that. And you. Let’s get back to you. Tell me more about London.

IPHIS

Loralei, I can’t just ignore what just happened—

*(LORALEI faces IPHIS with her arms crossed, almost defiant.)*

LORALEI

How about you just do this one thing for me, okay? Please, Iphis, just don’t talk about it. Let’s talk about London.

*(IPHIS looks at her worriedly before regretfully starting to speak.)*

IPHIS

Uhm, yeah, no, it’s been fine.

LORALEI

What do you mean it’s been fine? What have you been doing?

*(LORALEI’s mood shifts and she bounds over to IPHIS, pulling him up to stand with her.)*

*(Excitedly)* Tell me about it!

IPHIS

*(Unsure)* Well… I’ve made a lot of friends—some can be quite dull as most of them are studying business like me *(chuckle)* but… I have like—half my credits—I don’t know, Lora.

*(LORALEI nags on his sleeve playfully.)*

LORALEI

C’mon, there’s gotta be more than that.

IPHIS

Honestly, Lora? I’ve missed this place. You don’t even know how excited I was to visit.

LORALEI

Really?

IPHIS

*Yes.*

*(IPHIS walks away from her towards the shore and stares at it for a moment. He looks back at LORALEI.)*

I can’t tell you how much I’ve missed this beach and this wind—god, the wind is the best part, innit? It’s like it…

LORALEI

Carries you away?

*(Slight pause as IPHIS looks at her.)*

IPHIS

Yeah.

*(They look at each other for a moment and seem to see something in each other’s eyes.)*

Just because we haven’t really talked doesn’t mean I don’t care, Lora.

LORALEI

I never said you didn’t care. I—I know you care.

IPHIS

I just want to help you.

*(IPHIS looks at LORALEI, pleading with her to explain. LORALEI looks at IPHIS, pleading with him to stop.)*

I just want to understand, Lora.

*(LORALEI sighs and looks away from him. Her gaze lands on the horizon.)*

LORALEI

Iphis, do you ever feel like the world is folding in on you?

IPHIS

What do you mean?

LORALEI

Like—when I stand on this beach, the only thing I see in front of me is water, right? It’s endless… But if I look to the sides—see down there you can see the pier.

*(LORALEI leans into IPHIS and points towards the pier.)*

IPHIS

Mhm.

LORALEI

And there’s venders and an arcade and restaurants and all those people—and that way—

*(LORALEI points.)*

That way is town and the schools and *more* restaurants—where Seven Stars is—and *more* people and—

IPHIS

*(Encouraging)* Yeah, I know.

LORALEI

You know. Of course, you know. You know how fucking chaotic it can be sometimes.

IPHIS

I do.

LORALEI

It can all just be so suffocating. You ever feel like that, Iphis? Like you’re standing in between all this crazy shit and just—you know, staring at the edge of the world?

IPHIS

I’d never thought about it that way.

LORALEI

It’s just that the sea looks so appealing. It’s calm and it’s comfortable and it’s beautiful and it crashes against the land like it knows its purpose, it knows it has something to live for. I wish I was like that.

*(A bleak pause.)*

IPHIS

Do you ever feel like you can see *forever* right in front of you?

*(LORALEI cocks her head.)*

Like—I can see the next five hundred years *intransigent* before me, like it’s never going to change. People saythe world is constantly changing, but all I see is how it’s stayed the same.

*(IPHIS looks at her.)*

We’re so insignificant in the big picture, Lora—it’s terrifying to me. Five hundred years from now there will be a couple of friends, just like us, standing on a beach just like this, looking out to sea, thinking the world revolves around them and their shitty lives, no matter how the world changes. And you know what? We never even get the good ending*.* It just keeps repeating and repeating. *That’s* what scares me.

LORALEI

Wow. And you think—because it’s been like that?

IPHIS

Five hundred years behind, five hundred years ahead. Equipoise.

LORALEI

That’s… *gutting.*

IPHIS

*(Light scoff)* Yeah, I guess.

LORALEI

Aghhh, I’ve missed this. Talking to you.

IPHIS

Yeah? I’ve missed this too.

*(A beat.)*

*(Awkwardly)* Would you want to talk a bit more? About… you know. Your—stuff.

*(LORALEI glances at IPHIS witheringly. Not so much directed towards him but at the weight of the conversation.)*

LORALEI

*(Regretfully)* You really want to talk about this, Iphis?

IPHIS

I want to help you, Loralei, and I don’t think I can if I don’t know.

*(LORALEI sighs.)*

LORALEI

Alright. Uhm—Well, after you left, after graduation, you know, I was good! I was crackin’ on—sad, but that was to be expected, because I mean, everyone left, but—but that’s what I wanted. I wanted to stay and to ground myself because I mean—I knew I really wasn’t ready for any kind of big change.

IPHIS

That was a terrible time to leave you wasn’t it—

LORALEI

*No*, no, no, Iphis, it’s alright, I didn’t mean it like that. None of this is your fault.

IPHIS

None of what?

LORALEI

I—yeah. None of what—uhm.

*(LORALEI takes a deep breath.)*

*(Voice cracking)* Iphis, remember how I said it was suffocating?

IPHIS

Yeah?

LORALEI

It’s just—I don’t know how you do it. There’s so much pressure from *everyone, all the time.* To *do* better, to *work* better, to *look* better, to *feel* better, to just—be better! And you’re off in London being perfect and successful and in college and so are Benny and Pat and Michael and even Rony—that git—said he was quitting to leave for Barcelona soon and—oh my god, it’s just so much.

IPHIS

Don’t—

*(LORALEI quickly raises her hand in a warning.)*

LORALEI

Please.

*(IPHIS nods. A beat.)*

*(Slowly)* I just hurt. I hurt all the time. For fifteen different things everyday people ask me to do this and, to do that and, no one ever does anything for me, or asks how I’m doing. Because you know, really—I might tell them. Like I’m telling you, I—I keep thinking of telling anyone—just anyone. I keep thinking—

*(LORALEI’s eye water and her voice breaks at times.)*

I just want to tell someone one day to leave me here. Like a grain of sand waiting for the waves to take me out to sea. I want to just drift away and fall off the edge of the world. I want to escape, I want to *get out.*

*(LORALEI looks up at IPHIS, her face wet. IPHIS stares at her, grief-stricken, and after a millisecond grabs her and pulls her into a hug. LORALEI begins to cry. IPHIS mutters reassurances to her and rubs her back. His face scrunches up as he tightens his embrace.)*

IPHIS

I’m never letting go of you. Not again, Lora. *(Revelation)* I want you to come with me. Back to London.

*(LORALEI pulls back to look at IPHIS.)*

LORALEI

*(Disbelief)* What?

IPHIS

I *know* you just said that you weren’t ready two years ago and I *know* you’re going to say you aren’t ready now, but Lora, I don’t think that’s your problem. I think this *place* is your problem. You need to get out of Falmouth.

*(LORALEI flounders for a moment and just stares back at him.)*

LORALEI

I—Iphis, I mean, this is—fuck. I can’t think—I can’t see straight.

IPHIS

No, no, no, no, no, no, here, it’s okay.

*(IPHIS pulls her forward and they embrace again.)*

Don’t think just—just listen to me, alright? Ever since you’ve been here you’ve been suffering. You’ve suffered *so much,* Lora. A person should never deserve to suffer that much. If—if you came back to London with me, Lora, you could stay with me—I have room, and we could find you a job, nothing crazy—just a new start. Okay? Does that sound better?

*(LORALEI’s face is in his shoulder.)*

LORALEI

*(Muffled.)* That—that sounds amazing.

*(IPHIS visibly relaxes.)*

IPHIS

Right, yes—yes, it does.

*(LORALEI pulls back again.)*

LORALEI

But—Iphis, no, no, no, that’s so scary. That is *terrifying.*

IPHIS

Hey—Lora, what is more terrifying, to me, is you staying here, and still thinking about this stuff, okay? Think about the things we could do in London instead, Lora.

LORALEI

What could we do in London, Iphis?

IPHIS

I’ll take you to my favorite restaurants and I’ll introduce you to all my friends. Hyde park—I like to just sit and people-watch sometimes, but I also go there to read. God—one of my friends is such a nerd, he always gives me books to read and they’re actually—they’re wonderful. I’ve never been a reader until I met him. I’ll loan them to you. We’ll find you a job—you could even enroll in university! And you can start over. With me. Would you want that?

LORALEI

More than anything.

IPHIS

So, are you… will you come? Will you come with me?

*(LORALEI takes a deep breath.)*

LORALEI

I—I think. Okay.

IPHIS

Okay?

LORALEI

*(Nodding)* Okay.

*(Their faces both break out into radiant smiles. IPHIS surges forward and hugs her tightly again. The heartbeat from the beginning starts to pound, gradually getting faster and faster. It’s different this time though—more excited than worried.)*

IPHIS

Oh, my god, Lora, this is unreal. I can’t believe you really—you really said yes. I’m never letting you go. Not again.

*(LORALEI laughs into his shoulder. They pull away and LORALEI steps back, still smiling. The heartbeat is louder now; it’s rushing in time with the waves.)*

I can see our future, Lora. Maybe it doesn’t—maybe it doesn’t *have* to be repeating. We can break the equipoise. The story can change. One thousand years of perpetual calamity but—maybe, maybe we won’t stay the same. Maybe we can—

LORALEI

Maybe we can have the happy ending after all?

IPHIS

*(To himself)* Maybe we can have the happy ending after all.

LORALEI

Okay—okay. What happens now?

*(IPHIS’s heartbeat wavers and is silenced (theoretically).)*

IPHIS

What happens now? Lora, we have a train to board.

CURTAIN