

Learner Portfolio Writing

Read about the casting of Isabella/Joyce below, then choose one or two more pairs of characters to cast and explain:

Isabella / Joyce

Isabella Bird (1831-1904) is one of five real historical figures whom Marlene hosts in a celebratory dinner part in the first act. The actor who plays Isabella in the first act comes back in the second and third acts as Marlene's sister Joyce. Isabella Bird was a travel writer from Scotland in the 19th century. She spent her childhood and early adulthood trying to be the proper daughter of a clergyman by sewing and studying Latin. Though she had health issues throughout her life, Isabella had an intense desire to travel the world. The sacrifice Isabella had to live with was leaving her beloved sister behind at home. In Act One Scene One, she says: *'Hennie was happy... But I couldn't stay in Scotland...'* Although she misses her sister dearly, this didn't stop her from staying away. Later in the scene, when Nijo comments that she was homesick, Isabella replies: *'I longed to go home, / but home to what?'* Her love of traveling replaced any sense of love and duty to her old life, revealed when she admits that: *'I fell in love with the sea, there were rats in the cabin and ants in the food but suddenly it was like a new world.'* Even her marriage at age 50 is presented in the play as almost a kindness in return for his care of her sister, and after he died, she was free again to wander: *'I determined to leave my grief behind and set off for Tibet.'*

A century later, Joyce takes the opposite path, staying behind to care for family while her sister sets out into the world. They are two sides of the same woman: Isabella left and Joyce stayed. Now Joyce is raising her sister's child by herself. In this sense, Joyce is the opposite of Isabella, as she cannot escape the pull of her own feelings of responsibility. Even though Joyce struggles to care for Angie, who doesn't seem capable of caring for herself, she puts her duty to family first. When Marlene tells her, *'You could have left'* she responds: *'How could I have left?'* Later, it is revealed that Joyce made the ultimate sacrifice; like many of the other women in the play, Joyce has lost a child. She had a miscarriage due to the stress of caring for infant Angie, so raising Angie meant that she didn't get to have her own biological child.