



CUPID & PSYCHE

BY

MIKKI GILLETTE

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... There is an epidemic ravaging the dating pool of singles everywhere. Whether it's our ever-increasing obsession with social media, hard-fast moral principles we find dear being non-existent in others, or even a lack of hope of truly finding "the one." I would know: I've talked to my therapist frequently on these issues. I digress.*

For playwright, Mikki Gillette, nothing says "Happy Anniversary" quite like your partner saying "Let's break up" three lines later. What begins as a moment of unbridled honesty or flippant

apathy, slowly devolves into a dazzling dance of interjections. Characters Will and Emma deeply dive into the facets of identity, fears of intimacy, transphobia, and even the overarching existential dread of living a world that is just...well... as Emma says, "fucked." But the misery of today doesn't stop us from holding hope for a better tomorrow. Sometimes it just takes a change of perspective: someone seeing you as their very own "Stepford Wife". Psyche has her Cupid, Beyonce has Jay, and Fleas On The Dog now presents you to Mikki Gillette with Cupid and Psyche.

Five Stars

CUPID & PSYCHE

by

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CHARACTERS

EMMA – *a trans woman in her mid-20s; her vigilance, argumentativeness and suspicion can obscure her desire for connection*

WILL – *a cis man in his mid-20s; easygoing and levelheaded, his wry humor can't hide his earnest, caring nature*

SETTING

A restaurant in in mid-size U.S. city.

TIME

Present day.

PUNCTUATION NOTES

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

A dash (-) marks the halting of a thought.

EMMA, a trans woman in her early 20s, sits with WILL, a cis man in his early 20s at a restaurant. The two are a mixture of tension and boredom.

EMMA

Well, happy anniversary.

WILL

Thanks . . . three years. Not every couple makes it that long, I / guess

EMMA

Well, breaking up is sometimes the . . . sensible / option, I guess

WILL

Um, you're not saying – we're here to "celebrate," / right

EMMA

Yes, of – I mean, no, I wasn't suggesting we / break

WILL

Oh, good.

EMMA

Although, if you . . . wanted to explore – you can always bring things up, / you know

WILL

(guardedly intrigued)

Did . . . you want to "explore," / um

EMMA

Not exactly . . . I mean, I think it's fair to say things have felt a little . . . off lately.

WILL

Oh . . . “off” how?

(quickly)

I’m not / disagreeing

EMMA

It hasn’t seemed like either of us is really – we used to argue over the things we cared about, and it was stressful, but at least we each knew the other / cared

WILL

You don’t think I’ve stopped caring, do / you

EMMA

No . . . or –

(with difficulty)

It can feel like . . . you’ve decided you know what I’m going to say, and you’d rather avoid the conversation / entirely

WILL

Oh, I’m sorry you have that impression. I guess another way to look at it is, that you’ve helped me learn, and I’m no longer contesting – I mean, with transphobia, for instance. If you tell something I’ve said is transphobic, I assume now that you’re right, and, rather than / defending

EMMA

Okay, there are other things, / though

WILL

Or, when you accuse me of misogyny, or transmisogyny – well, I guess that transphobia / again

EMMA

Right. It’s nice that you – it’s not just arguing, or, I guess, “not arguing,” though . . . there’s been a distinct slow down in our –

(whispers)

Sex life.

WILL

True . . . but I don’t think that’s entirely uncommon for couples who’ve been together past a year or two, do you?

EMMA
(glum)

Maybe not.

WILL

I'm not trying to pretend we're . . . – it's felt uncomfortable to me, also.

EMMA
(sad, nervous)

It has? . . . How?

WILL

You've seemed preoccupied . . . You talk about climate change and the death of representative government a lot –

(quickly)

Which is understandable, since those are literally threatening our . . . – I just sometimes wonder if there might be other things you're worried about that you're choosing not to focus on instead.

EMMA

Oh. I hadn't thought – I mean the entire west coast literally burned down / last summer

WILL

Totally. I / agree

EMMA

But it's also possible – what would I be avoiding by fixating on existential / threats

WILL

I'm not sure.

EMMA

My boredom now that I've transitioned, maybe?

WILL

You feel bored?

EMMA

Well, I went from wondering if I'd make it through each day alive, to worrying about freeing up storage space on my iPhone, so . . . yeah, I'm kind / of

WILL

That makes / sense

EMMA

I'm sure that sounds whiny and / entitled

WILL

You're just being honest.

EMMA

Thanks.

WILL

Did you really want to, um, "explore" breaking / up

EMMA

I'm not sure. Did / you

WILL

I don't know. When we first met, it seemed like the last thing you wanted was to be half of a couple, so I was kind of surprised we began dating / at all

EMMA

I guess that's / true

WILL

I was really happy, / though

EMMA

(cries)

So was - I mean, I thought I was / happy

WILL

Is something / wrong

EMMA

I'm sorry. Just ignore my / crying

WILL

Emma . . . you can / tell me

EMMA

Every anniversary we come here, because it's where we had our first date, and I think, "What if

I'd listened to – what if we'd just not dated?" you know?

WILL

When we come here – you're saying our anniversary makes you want to break / up

EMMA

Kind of.

WILL

We could – we don't have to come to the same restaurant / each year

EMMA

It's not the place, specifically.

WILL

It isn't? . . . Can you say / what's

EMMA

I guess it's nostalgia, for the person who sat here and ranted about how unjust society was, and why women who dated were suckers.

WILL

You're still her, aren't / you

EMMA

It's our third anniversary, Will. I look more like a PTA mom here than a queer separatist.

WILL

I see your point, but didn't –

(cautious)

It seemed like when you spoke about those views you held, there was some fear and anxiety / they were

EMMA

I know. There were . . . That doesn't mean the points I expressed weren't correct, though.

WILL

You mean you're a – dating me makes / you a

EMMA

Kind of.

WILL

Oh . . . but I thought we – don't we love each other?

EMMA

Yes, but – women in the 19th century, who couldn't vote or own property "loved" / their

WILL

Do you think we're like / them

EMMA

Do I think we're dating in a sexist, transphobic society?

WILL

Um, that's not exactly what I / meant

EMMA

Do I think one of us benefits while the other suffers from the unequal structure we / inhabit

WILL

I hear that you're / upset

EMMA

I just can't stop thinking of a time when I prized my beliefs over . . . the emotional gains I acquired from surrendering them.

Pause. An uncomfortable beat passes as Emma experiences her sadness.

WILL

So maybe it wasn't just boredom you feeling?

EMMA

I guess.

WILL

I understand what you're saying.

EMMA

(skeptical)

You do?

WILL

Yes. At work I've seen how my career has advanced more quickly than equally talented female and queer colleagues of mine.

EMMA

Do you speak up?

WILL

Yes, but I'm just told that the choices are made objectively based on / performance

EMMA

Do you refuse the promotions?

WILL

(guilty)

No . . . When I'm in a position to hire, or select people for opportunities, / though, I

EMMA

God! . . . It's just one long, uninterrupted – this is probably why I wanted to stop battling. If I didn't, it's all I ever would / have done

WILL

I don't think you see how much you accomplish.

EMMA

Whatever.

WILL

You don't have to believe me. I think it's possible, though, that you can be in a relationship and also advocate for / equality

EMMA

Before, when we first started talking about this, it seemed like you were –

(hiding vulnerability)

Thinking about, um, breaking up, too.

WILL

Oh.

EMMA

Do you have . . . regrets / about

WILL

We don't have to – it's not / important

EMMA

You do? Why were you trying to convince / me

WILL

I just feel . . . a little exhausted.

EMMA

“Exhausted”? . . . By me, you / mean

WILL

I sometimes –

EMMA

You don't want to be / with me

WILL

I didn't say / that

EMMA

Do you want to split up / then

WILL

No. That's a - . . . I want to / stay

EMMA

You want to remain “exhausted”? You're happy /
being

WILL

I think I . . . when you withdraw, like you have been,
it creates a heaviness – between us, and that can
be draining.

EMMA

Oh.

WILL

And I don't know – it's totally your right to, um,
not engage, / but

EMMA

I didn't realize.

WILL

I don't want you to feel / bad

EMMA

That's fine . . . I guess I – when I withdrew, I assumed it made things easier, or that – I thought me not being a bitch was a positive for you.

WILL

I never thought you were a / bitch

EMMA

Just because it's our anniversary, doesn't mean you have to / lie

WILL

I'm being honest. I just think you – I admire you for acting on what / you believe

EMMA

Oh.

WILL

(hiding sadness)

But if . . . being in a relationship conflicts with your, um, principles, / then

EMMA

I don't know whether that's – I wouldn't / say

WILL

You talked before / about

EMMA

The world is fucked – or, not the world, but humans, who are destroying everything that allow us to live – what I'm trying to say is, just because shitty men created a patriarchal, transphobic, racist, etc. system, shouldn't mean . . . I don't get to be happy.

WILL

Oh . . . are you / saying

EMMA

I'm not sure.

WILL

Oh . . . um, I could use a clarification / on

EMMA

You honestly don't mind my constantly critiquing
cis, straight men, and, by extension, you / personally

WILL

It was . . . a little jarring at first, but, honestly / no, I

EMMA

And you prefer self-righteous, hectoring me, to /
subdued, checked out

WILL

God yes.

EMMA

Huh.

WILL

Stepford Wife you is . . . – I mean, you're
completely entitled to have a bad day, but / checked
out

EMMA

(surprised)

Okay . . . that's good to / know

WILL

Does this mean . . . we're not splitting up?

EMMA

Um . . . if you don't want to, then I / guess

WILL

I want us to – that night we met, I knew I was
falling in love / with you

EMMA

I did, too . . . and I thought, "Fuck, this / isn't what"

WILL

If you want to stay together, I do, too. But if / you don't

EMMA

I want to eat as fast as we can, race home, and fuck
till dawn.

WILL

I'm suddenly not hungry at all.

The two smile, gather their things, stand and exit.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Cupid & Psyche: the heart and the head. I spent my early transition devouring feminist and queer theory, likely in an effort to figure out why women and trans people were oppressed in our culture. While that sort of education can be illuminating and even liberating, it also makes you mad, like a certain character you encountered here. Writing this story was a way of exploring some questions my studies inspired, like: How do you stay in a relationship when you know, by dint of the hand you've drawn, things are intractably unfair? And what if, beneath a mind roiling with unimpeachable arguments against love, you are, at heart, a romantic?*

When working on this piece I thought of George Bernard Shaw, and his uncanny ability to start exploring social issues in depth just lines into a play. And his even greater feat of making that dialogue feel like a debate between real characters with actual stakes, rather than an aridly intellectual exercise. To me the conversation Emma has with Mark is humorous, but never abstract. It's my hope you found yourself reading it on the edge of your seat.

AUTHOR BIO: Mikki Gillette is a trans woman playwright. She was named one of Portland, OR's 25 Most Influential Artists by Willamette Week magazine. Her play *American Girl* was featured in *American Theatre* and was produced in April '23. Other productions include *The Queers* (Fuse Theatre '22), *My Perfectly Valid Objections* (Salt and Sage '23) and *They Them Their* (Fuse Theatre '23). Mikki's short *Intimate Matters* was published in Smith & Kraus's collection, *The Best Ten-Minute Plays of 2023*. She was a member of the Ashland New Plays Festival 2022 New Voices Cohort. Learn more at: mikkigillette.com.