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### Think Piece: The Caged Woman

In many of the stories, poems, and plays we have read this semester, there is a recurring image of the caged woman. This appears in the play *Twinkletoes* by Jennifer Johnston. This play shows multiple ways that women are trapped: by kids, medicine, marriage, and societal expectations.

The play is about a woman named Karen who returns home from her pregnant daughter's wedding, and as she makes herself comfortable, she talks about her life. She reports that her husband, Declan, is in prison for his involvement with the Irish Republican Army. He has been in prison for nine years, and for those nine years, she has had to wait for him like a good wife should. Karen explains that her husband is a hero, but she says that "it's hard being married to a hero. It's a bit like being in prison too" (240). She wishes that she was able to be with someone else. She talks about wanting to do a "slow foxtrot" with a man named Danny McCartney, whom she met at the wedding (248). Actually, she just wants to dance with "someone," anyone who will allow her to not be lonely anymore (248). Her marriage has become her prison, and she just wants to be free. She wants to be able to "jive. Jitterbug. Tango. Rock ... To have more kids ... To love" (247). However, Karen knows that she is expected to stay with her husband and to remain faithful, but she still feels that her husband "fucking well ruined [her] life" (247). While Karen is remembering her husband's arrest and how she was afraid to tell her father about it, she recalls that she used to get "shaking fits" and all she could do was "sit there with [her] hands locked between her knees" (241). This invited her doctor to offer her tablets (pills), but she refused to take them because she had "seen what the tablets did to other women" (241). Karen realizes how medication has been a way to trap women as well. A woman was so easily put on medication for even slightly deviating from what their society believed to be normal, and these pills caused them to become shells of themselves. Karen realizes that this would happen to her if she were to take the tablets and she says that she'd "rather feel" (241). Karen's daughter, Noreen, is trapped due to her pregnancy, and Karen realizes that her daughter is losing her freedom too. Her daughter's pregnancy is the obvious catalyst for her daughter getting married, but Karen tries to tell her daughter that "she [has] a choice" but her daughter "didn't believe [her]" (244). Like her mother, Noreen will also lose her freedom to her marriage, though she does not realize it yet.

Throughout history, women have been caged in similar ways to the women in *Twinkletoes*. They constantly face the expectations put on them by their society to be the model wife and mother, and along the way, these women lose their freedom, they lose their ability to dance and do the jitterbug whenever they want.