Acting Edition

New Golden Age

by Karen Hartman

SAMUEL FRENCH

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NEW GOLDEN AGE received its Off-Broadway premiere at Primary Stages (Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Shane D. Hudson, Executive Director; Casey Childs, Founder), May 2022. The performance was directed by Jade King Carroll, the scenic designer was Lee Savage, the costume designer was Jen Caprio, the sound designer was Fan Zhang, the wig, hair, and makeup design was by J. Jared Janas, the props designer was Carrie Mossman, the fight coordinator was Alex Might, the casting director was Stephanie Klapper, the production stage manager was Denise Cardarelli, and the assistant stage manager was Olivia Tymon. The play was presented as part of 59E59 Theaters' first annual AMPLIFY Festival (formerly VOLT) celebrating the work of Karen Hartman. The cast was as follows:

MAT . . . . . Doug Harris
LIN . . . . . Mahira Kakkar
POLLY . . . . . Claire Siebers
SILAS . . . . . Ricardy Fabre
JACE . . . . . Carmen Castillo

NEW GOLDEN AGE was a Finalist for the 2023 International Susan Smith Blackburn Prize.

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SPECIAL THANKS

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Also:

Workshop artists: Molly Camp, Erin Daley, Anastasia Davidson, Angel Desai, Susannah Flood, Jackson Gay, Chris Holtkamp, Lisa Hori-Garcia, Jen Jarnagin, David Alan Madrick, Deepa Purohit, ML Roberts, Emry Rockenield, Avery Trunko, Vincent Van der Velde, Noah Zachary.

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For getting this book into your hands: Skyler Gray, plus the team at Samuel French/Concord Theatricals especially Amy Rose Marsh, Garrett Anderson, and Ben Keiper.

CHARACTERS

MAT – A multibillionaire tech founder. First impression is warm, personable, and boyish. Mid thirties, male.

LIN – A professor and underground folk hero. Elegant and charismatic. Late forties, female.

POLLY – A gifted, unemployed performer. Lin's half-sister. Animated, emotional, and charming. Mid thirties, female.

SILAS – A rising star working for Mat. A superpower listener. Mid twenties, male.

JACE – The student leader of Lin's movement. Moral clarity where anger meets innocence. Also a singer. Early twenties, nonbinary (preferred) or female.

Lin looks East Asian or South Asian. Polly looks white. Mat looks white. Silas looks Black. Jace could be of any race.

SETTING

The world feels low tech and navigable. Consider practical lighting, or lighting with simple sources. No projections. We don't see phones, laptops, or other devices. Although this may seem seem like a play about technology, really it's about intimacy, so we want to feel close and real.

Lin's office is a high-status old-fashioned enclave in an Ivy League university. Dark wood. Crank windows. Homey touches like a plant or a candy bowl, but mostly this is a serious place full of paper. The door is important and wants a strong spot.

Elements of Mat's world (Sunlight) have been designed to evoke the ambient, tactile "past" of Lin's world.

TIME

One day in 2033.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Lin's scholarly theories are partially derived from the writings of Lina Khan and Shoshana Zuboff. All other aspects of the play are fictitious.

Dialogue in (parentheses) is an unspoken thought.

Italics indicate a stressed word, and **bold** indicates bigger urgency.

Fear is a specific form of intelligence that comes when hindsight, insight, and foresight collide.
– Valeria Luiselli, “Things as They Are”

we are each other’s
harvest:
we are each other’s
business:
we are each other’s magnitude and bond.
– Gwendolyn Brooks, “Paul Robeson”

New Golden Age is dedicated to Andrew Leynse (1969–2023),
in loving memory of his enthusiasm, generosity, and care.

PROLOGUE

Optional pre-show:

*(**JACE** enters. People are still settling.)*

*(**JACE** breathes.)*

JACE. Hey.

It's been a minute.

(Breathes.)

Would you please turn off your phones, anything that makes noise? I'll wait.

(Breathes.)

Look around. Get your bearings.

This is a play, but it's also a room.

(Words in [brackets] can be omitted or varied.)

[It has exits.]

(Briefly describes the exits.)

[Thank you for wearing your masks. Please keep them over your mouth and nose.]

(Breathes.)

We are here.

We are here.

(Breathes.)

JACE. We'll be here for about ninety minutes.

Or start here:

(Darkness. **JACE** *sings a cappella, ideally from somewhere else in the space.)*

OPEN YOUR EYE
PEEL BACK THE DAY
WELCOME THE LIGHT.
OPEN YOUR EYE
BEHIND THE LID
LIES GOLD
LET ME IN.
LET ME IN.

*(***MAT** *talks earnestly to us. Natural vibe, gentle light. No headset or anything like that.* **MAT** *designed his world to feel warm and incandescent, like a memory of twentieth century film.)*

MAT. Hey hey from Sunlight! Good to connect, amiright?

Thanks for tuning in, with your Sunplants. We got three point nine…

(Taps a spot on his face or neck, to check.)

crossing into four billion of you gathered today. Right here:

(Taps the same spot.)

Sunplant to Sunplant. The best and safest way to connect.

I have a gift to reveal. I'm pumped! Sunlight Seedbank!

You ask: Mat, after all Sunlight has given us, why and how could you give us more?

I'll start with why.

We emerge from an experiment. A massive, involuntary, long term experiment. For some it was permanent, and we grieve.

(Pause.)

Pause Nine hurt. I missed you. I missed you in my gut.

But one morning, was it day forty-one, day three oh five, my twins traced each other on big paper, cut out "friends" to tape on the walls. My sons are my life. My sons and Camille, as your families are no doubt your lives.

Nine-year-olds made a society. What does that tell me?

We need to connect.

Now, I worked eighteen hours a day since I was twenty, aight, so I missed years with BB and Mazz. Camille stepped to that labor and that joy. But in this Pause, Papa Mat was home for bedtime!

It was a humbling experience. I recommend it. Bedtime! It takes forever! But in the end, so –

(Chef's kiss meaning "so close.")

This Pause helped a lot of us get to some new domestic levels, amiright?

I want that bond for you.

I want it for my boys.

Now: some forces want to block closeness. Some elites want to outlaw our bonds. They try to use grandma "schools" and arthritis "laws" against us. When you hear "Right to the Dark," ask yourself, what have human beings feared most for all of history? Were the Dark Ages awesome?

We are not going back.

MAT. And yet there's been – I admit it – a gap between what some like to call Real Life and the way we shared through first wave Sunlight: AwareHome, InLight learning, Sunplants.

Folks still seek that messy drippy bite, the friction and the rub.

It's 2033 but we want to feel analog. Cozy. We want to remember.

Which brings me to How.

Spoiler alert, the answer is not the Outer Plains! That would be sad, lonely, and dangerous!

It's so sweet. When you got your free Sunplants, communication chips right here…

(Taps the same spot. It's an implant.)

that liberated you from clunky devices, *we* at Sunlight got a little sumpin sumpin that we didn't know how to use until now! We got your cells! Just a few, at the edge of the Sunplant.

And it turns out cells hold memories! *Wut wut!* Beautiful experiences, maybe tough experiences, even ancestors.

So what's the difference between the ways we already know you, and the new Seedbank Tale?

We are going to rebuild memory from your cells. Not eavesdropping, not eyeblink, the real you. Bio level.

Finally, we can share *you.*

Other people have always been our greatest source of pleasure and amusement. But other people bring plague and violence, amiright?

Seedbank Tales will transport you.

Make you feel that hug they call the Dark.

But safely, InLight.

We're even going to pay some of you.

Wut wut? Yasss!

If you are a Talent Worker who got lost in the Pause, now is your time.

We need you to help us shape the deep feels – sort these memories, weave the best of the Sunplant data, the squishiest stories, and make meaning.

Seedbank Tales.

Come do what you do again.

Bring on the truth. Pour out the clear raw juice.

This is culture! Get hype!

Together we will be so close.

Scene One

*(**SILAS** and **POLLY** converse charmingly, holding mugs. He is beautifully dressed. She hasn't shopped in a while, but works what she's got. Flirty, high-wattage mutual fascination.)*

SILAS. But tell me about you. Who are you?

POLLY. Oh my god it's so kind that you care!

SILAS. That's what I do!

POLLY. If you're gonna know me, you should know about my fam.

SILAS. Fam is all.

POLLY. I was married…to a great guy…who wanted terms that did not work for me!

SILAS. Such as?

POLLY. I'm all: "Let's have a baby!" and Hubs was more: "Let's group fuck a Walmart."

SILAS. Yeah that's pretty different.

POLLY. And muh name may be "Poly" but this girl is "Mono."

SILAS. *(Cracking up.)* So real.

POLLY. And I'm like…with what power can I step out of this marriage and reset my terms? The power of TIME.

SILAS. YASSSS.

POLLY. Thus the egg freeze. TMI?

SILAS. I want all the I. All. The. I. No such thing as an "ova-"share.

POLLY. *(Cracking up.)* Ova!

I did not expect this to be so –

SILAS. Click?

POLLY. Click, hells yeah even a –

SILAS. Boom?

POLLY. Boom.

SILAS. If I were female, I would freeze, definitely. Why be tied to bio?

POLLY. It's freedom.

SILAS. With adequate time, you can equalize any imbalance.

POLLY. Such as: if procreation is *natural* why is it *fuckin impossible* to raise kids without a gatrillion dollars?

SILAS. That right there.

POLLY. To have a job you need to *give* a job; you personally must personally pay for every hour you get paid. How is that math?

SILAS. It's not math.

POLLY. It's ass math.

SILAS. I mean there's AwareHome, for the gaps.

POLLY. A camera is not care!

SILAS. Respect.

POLLY. So as a Talent Worker, and as a lady, I chose to disrupt.

SILAS. I like it.

POLLY. Yay!

*(***SILAS** *offers* **POLLY** *an energy bar. She eats it weirdly fast.)*

SILAS. I can't be compelled by a victim. I won't identify because…

Self Preservation of the Mind. I could. I could get Woe is Me and focus on racial circumstances –

POLLY. *(Mouth full.)* And you would be *so justified* –

SILAS. You could go Woe is Me on the gender aspect. But we don't.

Which makes us heroes of our own lives. And that's attractive. You're attractive.

POLLY. Thank you.

SILAS. Put me in some kind of driver's seat or I'm out the car!

POLLY. I hear that.

SILAS. Find a way – always – that the victim is also the perp.

POLLY. And vice versa!

SILAS. So, you ditch multi-player man and reclaim your time!

POLLY. My mom paid for the procedure.

SILAS. GO MOM. Are you like –

(Chef's kiss meaning "so close?")

POLLY. Truth, my mom is quite basic and we don't connect? But when I regard her in context I feel compassion. Utter compassion.

SILAS. Like an empathy?

POLLY. I wish it were an empathy. Though this is where my mom –

(Super moved but keeps it together.)

My mom is a fuckin hero. She grew up end of the twentieth with all the toxic misogyny of that era, but turned it around in one generation, raised me *without* the self-loathing; so I don't empathize because I don't carry her same burdens, but that's because *she* unburdened *me*!

SILAS. My folks are immigrants so I feel you. They drag something I don't. They flourish through me.

POLLY. Tell me more!

SILAS. So, Mom is basic but a hero.

POLLY. And she wants romance.

SILAS. We need to connect.

POLLY. YAS. So she's beating the odds, fighting her own lady-clock… you know where I'm going –

SILAS. I do not.

POLLY. Surgery!

SILAS. *(Positive.)* Oh shit.

POLLY. Yeah, while I'm all –

(Mimes shots in her ass with a chakka chakka sound.)

Mom's doing –

(Chakka chakka for botox, brow, and mouth.)

SILAS. Oh you're wicked!

POLLY. Her face goes smooth and kind of –

(Makes a blank happy face.)

And Mom's losing her hearing so her expression goes all Alert Barbie like –

(Alert Barbie face.)

Which is charming, but –

SILAS. You lose your connection.

POLLY. *(YES YOU UNDERSTAND.)* I *lose* my connection to my *mom*.

SILAS. So deep.

POLLY. You want this?

SILAS. I want it all!

POLLY. Then when it's time for my egg harvest she latebooks full face and neck, *in MexiCal.*

SILAS. Damn.

POLLY. She paid my med fees but now she wants me to cancel and be her person, like change her bandages, and I'm just –

SILAS. *(A little extra as Polly.)* **Fuck you, Mom!**

POLLY. Not those words, but –

(In conversation with Mom.)

Mom, don't you want the future?

Instead of trying to smooth your way to the past?

(To **SILAS**.*)* Back in the day Mom could wreck you with an eyebrow. Her face was a superstore of emotion.

SILAS. And to shut off all those aisles…

POLLY. YAS, between the deafness and the Resting Alert Face my mom is literally becoming a wax replicant. Meanwhile my hormones amplify feels 'til I'm ugly crying "Yo I need you, yo don't do this, Mommy keep your faaaace –"

SILAS. Did you go to her surgery?

POLLY. No. I chose the eggs.

SILAS. Who went?

POLLY. My sister. Half, on my dad's side.

SILAS. Ah, so it wasn't her face.

POLLY. *(YES YOU UNDERSTAND.) It wasn't her face.* She goes in my place which I appreciate but also…

SILAS. Also?

POLLY. Full disclose do not appreciate?

SILAS. Why?

POLLY. My sister is uber-righteous.

SILAS. Yeah?

POLLY. So I like need but also do not need for her to assume my duties.

SILAS. So Lin goes.

(Weird that **SILAS** *said "Lin," but* **POLLY** *doesn't miss a beat.)*

POLLY. Lin goes.

SILAS. Win win!

POLLY. Sure!

SILAS. Go Mommy! Go Polly!

POLLY. Yay!

SILAS. How does she look?

POLLY. **She died!**

SILAS. What.

POLLY. She totally never woke up! Anesthesia error.

SILAS. Your mother *died*?

POLLY. Deadass.

SILAS. Of a facelift?

POLLY. That makes her sound shallow but yeah, of the prep.

SILAS. This was when?

POLLY. Three weeks?

(Beat.)

SILAS. Where do we go from here.

POLLY. We pivot! In this Seedbank Tale I see the circle of life – Mom dies of elective cosmetic shit while girl in her prime chases base functionality – three generations, all compromised, all for sale, yet the *choices* within that! We lean into the choice, Silas! We drive the fucking car!

(This was an interview and it's over.)

SILAS. Grand.

Jocelyn will walk you out.

*(***POLLY** *stands, holding her coffee.)*

POLLY. I truly believe folks everywhere will respond, especially the way the Seedbank Tales will resurrect body memory. Mom never got a Sunplant but I kept her hairbrush so the cells are right there. We can reconstruct all the feels!

SILAS. Would you be willing to eat your mother's hair to get her memory cells?

POLLY. I'm in!

SILAS. *(Kind.)* For this phase it's too niche.

POLLY. Niche, I mean technically women are like half the people…

SILAS. I wish I were God.

POLLY. I can't pay.

SILAS. Oh this was free.

POLLY. They're gonna repurpose my eggs.

SILAS. Kay.

POLLY. Deposit expires tomorrow.

SILAS. Kay.

POLLY. Not Kay. Nokay.

SILAS. You have family.

POLLY. My mom left debt.

SILAS. You have Lin.

POLLY. I can't ask Lin. I need this gig.

SILAS. Fam is all.

(Micro-beat.)

POLLY. Silas, why am I here?

SILAS. You know your resources. Jocelyn?

POLLY. You called me in to get to Lin. Not my ideas. Not my Introvid.

SILAS. Your Introvid was fire, for real.

POLLY. I didn't get to fully convey, I am so pumped for Seedbank Tales. As a highly-trained talent worker with mad empathy skills, I will weave, spin, and crush whatever cell memories you choose into a bio-level share that goes deep. I am all about meaning.

SILAS. *(Cheerful, at no point sinister.)* We know what we need. You know what you got.

POLLY. I can't offer my sister.

SILAS. We love Lin.

POLLY. Don't bullshit me.

SILAS. She's grassroots and she's wise.

POLLY. Is Mat targeting her?

SILAS. Mat is a planet. Probably in God Mode right now, clocking us.

POLLY. Lin addresses Congress today. Is Sunlight vulnerable?

SILAS. To what?

POLLY. Right to the Dark. Actual touch. Actual connection.

SILAS. Hey hey.

POLLY. Paper zines, picnics on the LowLow, food from the ground. Lin is popular.

SILAS. The endowed chair behind casement windows at a U with a four percent acceptance rate? Popular as in "of the peeps"?

POLLY. Lin is epic.

SILAS. Sunlight will launch Lin's Tale. That's unstoppable.

POLLY. You don't even know her.

SILAS. Mat can do it his way…

POLLY. What's "his way"?

SILAS. Or we can partner for the inside track. Raise your authentic sister. Texture, feels. Truth.

POLLY. The "Tale of the Dark."

SILAS. What's your access?

POLLY. I am her sister. I live in her home.

SILAS. What's that like?

POLLY. I mean, quiet. She works a lot. Shrouded in mystery.

SILAS. And her office? The Enclave?

POLLY. I should go.

SILAS. I told you my parents were immigrants? Also, Underforce.

POLLY. Whoa. How did / they (get there)?

SILAS. What did they do?

POLLY. Oh I don't assume they did – the whole sys/tem –

SILAS. Uh uh uh! Driver's seat!

POLLY. I don't even know where to –

*(**SILAS** keeps it light.)*

SILAS. They started a business! Tech Repair! Took out a loan! Expanding right before Pause Five, when the law flipped to –

POLLY. Debt Redemption via Labor.

SILAS. That right there. One minute we're at the kitchen table puzzling out how to make payroll, and the next minute sirens, a crew at the door, Mom and Pop get pulled to the basement and branded for Underforce.

POLLY. Oh Silas.

SILAS. Clock ran out!

POLLY. Are your folks still –

SILAS. Nearly redeemed!

POLLY. Whoa. What are the odds?

SILAS. Two percent. I owe Mat everything. Raised Underforce since age ten and I'm full time at Sunlight! Anything is possible.

*(**POLLY**'s Sunplant pings.)*

I'm authorized to back you for that amount right now.

*(**POLLY** checks her Sunplant, as if she's reading something behind her eyes. The amount is a lot. The agreement is long.)*

POLLY. Wow, generous. But I don't care about –

SILAS. You're not a resource person, you're a connection person. Me too. But no shame in needing upfront funds. Most Talent Workers do. Advance vests on delivery.

POLLY. Delivery of what?

SILAS. It's all in the agreement.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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