

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for pre-intermediate learners. The name of the story is *Eileen*. You can find a transcript of the episode at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/AI. That's EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/AI. There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Recently, it feels like everyone is talking about one thing: artificial intelligence, or AI for short. Artificial intelligence is computers learning how to think like humans, and recently there has been lots of news about AI, because the technology is improving very quickly. It is improving at an exponential rate.

When something is **exponential**, it means that it is growing faster and faster. For example, viruses generally grow at an exponential rate, because as more people get the virus, more people can give the virus to other people. If you look at exponential growth on a graph, it curves upwards, like a hill, so we can talk about an exponential growth curve.

Anyway, AI technology is now improving at an exponential rate, and it's hard to read all the news about it. By the time this episode comes out, there will probably be lots of fresh news about AI. However, the traditional media – newspapers and TV channels – aren't doing a very good job of talking about it, so you might not know everything that's going on.

And that's the difficult thing. I was watching lots of YouTube videos on the topic, but the news was honestly very scary. I was interested, but I couldn't listen to too much AI news or I would start to worry. But the other day, [I heard an episode of the podcast *Your Undivided Attention*. The podcast episode is called 'The AI Dilemma'](#) – a dilemma is a serious problem or issue. The episode is a recording of a talk from the Center for Humane Technology about the dangers of AI.

This talk had lots of good information, but it wasn't pessimistic – it didn't just focus on the negative things that could happen with AI. However, it also wasn't super optimistic. That's a problem I have with a lot of AI news. As they say in the podcast episode: every good thing that could happen with AI has an opposite that's just as bad! It could be both heaven and hell.

So what's going on in the world of AI? Well, GPT-4 was recently released, which is the most popular AI language model in the world. You may have heard of ChatGPT, which uses GPT as its database. ChatGPT-3 was OK, but it wasn't really very useful. Now, with ChatGPT-4, people are already using it to solve maths problems, translate languages, correct computer coding, get ideas for writing and so on. If you want, you can go to OpenAI's website and make a profile to try ChatGPT out for yourself. It's open to the public, although if you have a free account, you can't use it as much.

Those might all sound like useful things I just mentioned, but in *Your Undivided Attention* they also talked about some very scary things that are happening with GPT-4 and other AIs, and how they maybe shouldn't be available to the public. There are many abilities AIs have that the creators didn't know about, and when they found out, they didn't know *how* the AI learned that skill.

For example, one AI was trained on English language data to answer questions about science in English. But then they found out it could answer questions in Persian as well. How did the AI learn Persian, and why did it decide to do so? We don't know! ChatGPT also has

a graduate-level knowledge of chemistry. That is, it understands chemistry as well as someone who studied it at university. That sounds great, but it also means that ChatGPT can help people build a bomb, for example.

And that's not all. The latest AI can easily break passwords, and there's one tool that uses a recording of your voice to create more audio that sounds like you. You might be thinking, 'Well, that was available before.' But this tool only needs *three seconds* of audio to be able to copy your voice. That's scary!

So far, the discussion about the dangers of AI has been in specific areas. There have been discussions about AI art, programmers losing jobs and so on. But in this podcast episode, they argue that this is a much wider problem. They compare it to nuclear weapons – atom bombs. While nuclear weapons could destroy our physical reality, AI could destroy our understanding of reality. At any time, an AI could be used to steal your passwords, or you could talk to a friend online and not know that it's actually an AI.

It sounds very pessimistic, but actually, there is hope! They talk about how, during the cold war, the US government led a lot of discussions about nuclear weapons and people shared their opinions, and now we have international laws that mean only some countries can have nuclear weapons, and they can only have a certain amount. Of course, that's still pretty bad... but I *am* alive to talk about all this, so it could've been worse!

Anyway, as you can tell this is a topic I find very interesting, even though it is very scary. So I decided to write an episode of *Easy Stories in English* with the help of AI. Don't worry, I didn't let the computer do all the work for me! I worked *together* with ChatGPT to write today's story, and the results were interesting. Very interesting. I'll tell you more about how that worked after the story.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

When a child is **precocious**, it means that they act much older than they are. Precocious children might read a lot of books, ask difficult questions to adults and understand people's emotions very well. Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* is a very precocious child.

When you **bully** someone, you are mean to them for no reason. Most bullies are found in schools, and they are mean to and hurt other kids for fun. Bullying is a serious problem, because if you are bullied, it can affect you for your whole life.

When you want to change how someone looks, you can give them a **disguise**. For example, maybe you want to talk to someone you like, but you don't want them to know who you are. So you disguise yourself. You put on glasses, grow a beard, change your clothes, change your voice and so on. People use disguises a lot in spy movies, like James Bond. You can also disguise your emotions, hide how you really feel about something.

A **bruise** is a blue, yellow or purple mark that you get when you hurt yourself. For example, if someone hits you, you will have a bruise on your arm. If you fall over, you will have a bruise on your leg. Bruises usually take a few days to go away.

Acid is a liquid that is used in scientific experiments. Acid is quite dangerous, as it can burn your skin. Acids lower the pH level of something. Some food is also acidic. For example, lemons are very acidic, which is why they taste sour.

Climate change, or global warming, is the way that our world is changing. Because we burn too many fossil fuels like oil and gas, we are raising the level of CO², carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere. This makes the world hotter, and so the climate changes. Of course, the super powerful computers needed to run AI aren't helping slow down climate change!

When you **come up with** something, you think of an idea or a plan. For example, the first thing I have to do when writing an episode of *Easy Stories in English* is come up with an idea for the story. If I'm having a really good day, I might come up with several ideas!

Hacking is when you break into someone else's phone or computer. People who hack into other people's technology are called hackers. Hackers usually hack so that they can steal data or money, or embarrass someone. Obviously, hacking is illegal.

If you **disprove** something, then you show that it is wrong. When you are doing a scientific experiment, you start with a hypothesis, an idea that you want to prove. Sometimes, you have a null hypothesis: you want to prove that there is *not* a relation between two things. Often, this is to disprove a hypothesis from other studies. Of course, in order to disprove a hypothesis you'll need lots of scientific studies, not just one!

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OK, so listen and enjoy!

Eileen

Once upon a time, there was a little girl called Eileen who learned faster than everyone else. Yes, she was a girl, although many of the other children at school also thought she was a boy, because she always had her hair cut short. 'Long hair wastes time,' she said, and if a kid kept asking about it, she said it again in Chinese.

While her classmates played with rocks and sang songs, Eileen did maths problems in her head. At that point, the adults hadn't realised just how different she was. They thought she was just a very **precocious** child. But as the years passed, the issue became clearer.

You see, Eileen's growth in intelligence was **exponential**. That was an idea she understood already at the age of eight, while the other children were working on basic maths. Outside the classroom, the kids had stopped playing with rocks and started **bullying** each other, but Eileen continued to sit alone, dreaming of her own exponential **growth curve**.

Of course, they bullied Eileen, too. It was impossible not to hate her. When she wasn't telling you you were wrong, and exactly *why* you were wrong, she was telling you not to be so loud. Couldn't you see she needed to think? At first, her parents complained to the school about the bullies, but soon they started to think, 'Well, maybe some bullying will help her be a bit more normal?'

You could have said that the bullying grew exponentially. First, the kids called Eileen cruel names. Then, they stole her lunch and tore up her homework. By the end of the year, they were following her home and throwing rocks at her.

Eileen never ran from them. She just walked calmly. If she felt sad, she **disguised** it well. Most of the rocks didn't hit her, anyway, and when a rock did hit her, it never left a **bruise**. Her parents hid inside, the curtains closed, and watched as the children got bored and left her. Then they opened the door to Eileen and said, 'Welcome home, darling!' and tried to sound very, very happy.

Eileen's mother, Jennifer, felt horrible about all this. Before she gave birth, she loved the idea of a precocious daughter. Hermione Granger had always been her favourite *Harry Potter* character. But those were films, and as Eileen began to act more and more like a character, her mother stopped seeing her as a human.

One night, she woke up and heard a noise coming from Eileen's room. She had got a chemistry set recently, so Jennifer thought she was playing with that. That made her happy. Eileen had been disappointed with the chemistry set at first, because she said there were 'no acids'. Jennifer thought that maybe, just maybe, Eileen had started playing with toys like a normal child. And she wanted to see that. She wanted hope.

But when she walked into Eileen's room, she found the girl lying under her bed, writing in a notebook.

'Eileen,' said Jennifer. 'What are you doing? Why are you down there?'

She knew she should've said, 'It's past your bedtime,' but she hadn't been able to punish Eileen for a long time. It just never worked. Eileen always said something like, 'There are many theories about good parenting, and you follow none of them,' and then Jennifer felt like *she* was being punished.

But this time, Eileen just said, 'I'm writing poetry. Unusual spaces help me feel creative.' Then she said something in Chinese. It was probably her own translation of the phrase. She liked doing that.

Still, Jennifer was excited. Eileen was being *creative*. She was a bit young to be writing poetry, but at least she wasn't playing with acid.

'Oh! I'll leave you to write, then.'

Jennifer stopped at the door. She had to know.

'What... kind of poetry? I mean, what are you writing about?'

Eileen replied, again without turning around.

'Climate change. I came up with some ideas for how to end climate change, you see, and I'm trying to find the best way to explain them to people. Most scientists never use poetry. Because they're stupid.'

'Oh,' said Jennifer, disguising her fear.

After that night, whenever she heard strange noises coming from Eileen's room, she didn't go in. And sometimes, when she and her husband watched the bullies throw rocks at Eileen, she felt like throwing a rock herself.

Perhaps, like Eileen's parents, you thought that the bullies would help make the girl normal. It is a cruel thought, I know, but don't worry – this is a space to share our feelings. We're all humans here.

But the bullying did not work. Eileen saw the exponential growth curve and she stopped it.

At the beginning of the next school year, very few children came into school. Some drank from their water bottle as they sat on the bus, and found that the water had been replaced with acid. Some found that their internet accounts had been *hacked*, and embarrassing pictures of them had been posted online. And some woke up with a strange bruise on their neck and found that they couldn't speak English – everything they said came out in Chinese.

There was no way to prove that Eileen did it, but just like you, everyone thought it was her. She was very happy at school that day. She even smiled. She never smiled, usually. She was too busy coming up with ideas to change the world, all in her head. And that was all she did that day, because her teachers refused to work. They went to the head teacher's office and said they wouldn't teach until that 'thing' was gone.

Eileen didn't seem to mind. That day, none of the other children laughed at her or threw rocks at her, and when she looked at them, they ran away and hid.

By the time Eileen came home, her parents had heard everything. And they'd had enough.

The door was locked. They thought Eileen would get mad and try to break the door down. But she was calm about the whole thing. Terribly calm. She looked for the spare key which they kept under a flower pot in the garden and found that it was gone.

Weeks ago, Eileen had already expected this. She was always great at planning and expecting what might happen. Much better than her parents. They used to go to the supermarket with her and she would tell them exactly what they needed to buy, and even suggest new recipes.

At first, they had thought it was sweet. Now they watched through the bedroom curtains, shaking with fear, as their daughter pulled another front door key from her pocket. She must have had it copied. Where did she even get the money?

Jennifer screamed. But the little girl didn't open the door. She just looked up at the window where her parents were hiding and waved at them. It was like she was saying, *I could come and get you if I wanted to.*

But she didn't. She put the key back in her pocket, turned around and left. They watched her walk down the street and disappear into the town. They didn't relax until she was gone, and even then, they stood holding each other in the bedroom for almost an hour.

Nobody knew where Eileen went, but they kept waiting to find out. She was a time bomb. Her growth curve flew like a jet plane into the sky, heading to planets no human could see. To places no human could breathe. Surely, surely soon she would appear and pull them back into her world?

Months passed, and then years, and still, Eileen could not be found. Jennifer screamed at children who asked their parents precocious questions. Every time one of Eileen's old classmates got a bruise, they bit their fingers until they bled. Brave computer hackers called themselves 'Eileen', and then they got hacked, too. Nowhere was safe, because she was everywhere and she was nothing.

Life went on like before. Presidents lied, wars were fought and climate change continued. But now, nobody could trust themselves or the people around them. Perhaps, all this time, your husband, your dog, your boss was just Eileen in disguise. Perhaps the whole world was Eileen. There was no way of knowing, and no way to **disprove** it.

And isn't that what scientists say? If you can't disprove something, then there's still a chance it might be true.

She was just a child, I hear you say. But children are the key to the future. We can only hope they choose the right door.

THE END

So, earlier in this episode, I lied to you! I told you I worked with ChatGPT to write this story, but in fact I wrote it all myself. I know, it's a cheap trick, but... did it make you feel differently about the story as you read it?

I've heard some writers say that in the future, we'll be able to use AI to help us write. Just like people will probably always appreciate a painting that was done by a human rather than a machine, it's unlikely that computers will ever completely replace human writers. But human writers might ask an AI to give them a list of story ideas, or change the way a character speaks.

I mostly agreed with this, until I heard [an argument that someone made on a podcast episode](#). They basically said: if you give an artist too many tools, too many ways of creating the art, often they won't do anything at all. And I immediately understood. How many of us have tried to do digital art, but given up because there are so many programs and so many ways of drawing? How many of us buy lots of expensive equipment to help us cook and then just buy ready meals from the supermarket? How many people say they're going to write a novel and then never actually do it?

So, although I've experimented with using AI to help me write in the past few weeks, it just didn't feel natural to actually make it part of the writing process. I'm not saying I would never use it, but for this story it didn't make sense. You see, if I asked an AI to give me ideas for writing a story about AI, there is no way the ideas would be original! Actually, once I'd finished the story, I put most of it into ChatGPT and asked it to write its own endings, and the results were... interesting. I'll talk about that more at the end.

Going back to my story, it really is just a mix of all my feelings about AI. For years and years there have been science fiction and horror films about artificial intelligence turning evil and killing humans. And usually, the AI is shown like Eileen is in the story: it has no feelings. It can't talk and act like other people. It's not *normal*. And when it does act normal, it's a disguise that it's using to trick people.

This reminds me of how autistic people are shown in books, films and TV shows. Things are getting better now, but in the past autistic people were shown like Eileen, as well. I'm autistic myself, and there are parts of Eileen's story that I understand, although I want to make it clear that I am *not* as clever as she is and if you throw a rock at me, I will say, 'Ow!'

Another thing I've been thinking about a lot is China. Obviously, there is a lot of fear and misunderstanding about China here in the West. American politicians especially like to talk about fears of AI and fears of the Chinese government at the same time, and many people argue that if we don't keep developing AI, then China will 'get there first' and use that power to control us.

As I said earlier, I have very mixed feelings about AI, and it's even harder when discussions around AI are used to push politics and hatred. Of course, there's no way of discussing AI *without* politics, but it's clear to me that the scary parts of AI aren't just coming from China, and Western governments are already using AI in evil ways as well. It's also clear that AIs learn negative human behaviours, as long as those behaviours appear in the data sets that are used to train them. For example, if you ask it the right thing, ChatGPT will give extremely racist and sexist responses, even though the creators try to stop it from doing this.

But that wasn't the main issue when I asked ChatGPT to write its own ending to my story. It was something much simpler: it didn't understand what the story was actually saying. See, although the story is technically about a little girl, it's *really* about AI. I didn't expect ChatGPT to understand that, as it's quite subtle, but I thought it would at least understand that it was a dark story, and not write a happy ending.

But that's exactly what it did! I suppose because the story was about a child, it decided to write the kind of ending you'd find in a children's book.

In this version, the day after her parents lock her out of the house, Eileen goes back to the school and finds that everyone is gone, except for one teacher, Mrs Wilson, who was always nice to her. Eileen explains that she feels bad, that she only wanted other people to see things the way she did. Mrs Wilson tells her that the way to change the world is by being a good example, 'by doing good things and inspiring others to do the same.'

And it ends with this *amazing* paragraph: 'Eileen smiled back and followed her teacher out of the empty school. As they walked down the street, Eileen thought about what Mrs Wilson had said. Maybe she couldn't change the world with acid and hacking and Chinese curses. But maybe she could change it with something even more powerful: kindness.'

I laughed out loud when I read the last line. Somehow, my dark story about AI turned into a Disney film! But that just shows you that AI has a lot to learn before it can write great fiction, or even good fiction.

One of the advantages of ChatGPT specifically is that you can ask it to do the same thing again, but change things a bit. So I told it to rewrite the ending, but make it more dark.

So it wrote something out of a bad horror film. This time, Jennifer goes into Eileen's room and finds that she's turned into a demon, a monster: her eyes go black and she chants in that 'strange language' from before. You know in horror films when a bunch of people stand in a circle and say words in Latin? Like [chants]. That's chanting.

That was the really interesting part – in both versions that ChatGPT produced, it mentioned Eileen 'talking in that language that nobody could understand'. In the original story, I made it clear that the language was Chinese. I never said that it was 'strange' or 'scary'. That just shows how ChatGPT saw patterns from Western films and TV shows, where foreign languages are often presented as scary and different, and used that to add a racist message to the story. Wonderful. I'm glad I wrote the actual story by myself!

If you want to read ChatGPT's versions of the ending in full, go to the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/AI](https://www.easystoriesinenglish.com/AI). I've put them at the bottom of the page. I'd also love it if you left a comment under the episode and told me what you thought about it, and your thoughts on AI in general.

Anyway, I won't be using AI to write my stories any time soon. It's possible that I could use AI to *record* the stories for me, but could an AI do THIS? [makes ridiculous noises]. See, *that's* a strange and scary language. If Eileen was here, she wouldn't be so calm, would she?

So, goodbye for now from your very *human* host, Ariel Goodbody.

Actually, let's not end things here... See, since I recorded this episode, I discovered a new AI tool called ElevenLabs, which lets you clone a voice quite accurately. And it's surprisingly cheap. You can try it out for just five dollars a month, and the first month is one dollar. So I decided to give it a go.

The audio you're hearing now was not recorded by me, but by my voice clone. Well, you probably didn't need me to tell you that! I'll be honest, the results are worse than I expected. I imagine it's because I do a storytelling podcast, and so I use my voice in lots of different ways, and the AI works best when you only speak in one way. It definitely sounded more accurate in the examples I heard from other people, but then those people don't change their voice as much as I do.

I also have to say, it's doing strange things with my accent. Like, it's making me sound like an American trying to do a very stereotypical British accent. And most importantly, it's NOT talking slowly and clearly like I do on the podcast, which is a very important quality!

It's really hard to say all this without sounding like I'm bragging, like I'm talking about how great I am. Because it is a nice feeling: my voice acting is *too good*, and an AI can't copy it well! Of course, I could just use samples of me talking in one particular way, but then I'd get an AI that just speaks in that way. I could create lots of AI voices based off me talking in different ways, but at that point... I can just record the episode myself.

ElevenLabs *does* let you adjust a setting called 'stability'. A higher stability will mean the voice will sound more boring but is less likely to speak in a strange way, but for longer pieces of text, they recommend using a lower stability level.

By the way, if you're thinking, 'Hey, Ariel, this doesn't sound THAT bad,' what you just listened to is a combination of recordings that I put together myself. I experimented with the tools, using different samples of my voice to create the voice clone, and generated the sound file using different stability settings. Some of them, like when I used zero percent stability, sound really funny, and some of them sound horrifying. Here are some of the funniest results:

[voice samples]

So, yeah. I can only really think of two uses for this now. One, if I make a mistake when recording and only notice later, I can get the AI to say one or two words for me and put them in the episode. Yes, I know I could rerecord the line and edit it in, but I'm lazy! The other use would be if I go nonspeaking again, but now that I've heard what it sounds like, I wouldn't want to make anyone listen to a whole episode of this voice! So for now, I think I'll keep doing things the old-fashioned way.

Finally, just for fun, I tried recording a disgusting little gremlin voice. You know, the voice of a dirty little monster and that's how this sounds like. When using it on a higher stability level, it seems to make it sound much more like a normal person. Next, I tried it on a lower stability level. But even then, it still sounded far too normal. Like, listen to how this sounds and imagine the recording I used to clone the voice. Go on, get a good picture in your head. Now, I'm going to play the original file.

[original gremlin recording]

Here, you can really tell that the AI is comparing my voice to 'normal' voice recordings and building something that isn't there. At least, that's what I think it's doing. To be honest, I'm pretty disappointed again. I thought it would be really fun to play around with weird voices like that! But I guess I'll just have to be the gremlin myself...

If you enjoyed today's episode and want to be able to read my stories in a physical format, then good news! I have a book of ten short stories called, well, [Easy Stories in English](#). Get it on Amazon, Apple Books or Google Books, or go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Book](#) to find out all the places it's available. Thank you for listening, and see you in two weeks!

ChatGPT's endings

Ending 1

The teachers refused to work because they were afraid of what Eileen might do. They had heard rumors of what had happened to the children who had bullied her, and they were scared. They didn't want to be next. So they all called in sick, leaving the school completely empty except for Eileen.

Eileen was surprised to find the school empty when she arrived. She had expected to see her classmates and teachers, but instead, she was alone. She walked through the silent halls, feeling a sense of power that she had never felt before. For the first time in her life, she was truly in control.

As she walked, she started to think about what she could do with this power. She could change the world, she realized. She could make people see things the way she saw them, and do things the way she did them. She could be a leader, a hero.

And then she heard a noise. It was coming from the library. Eileen walked cautiously toward the sound, wondering who or what could be in the school with her.

When she got to the library, she saw a figure standing in the shadows. It was her teacher, Mrs. Wilson. Eileen had always liked Mrs. Wilson, who had encouraged her to read more and had even given her some extra books to take home.

"Eileen?" Mrs. Wilson said, stepping forward. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Eileen replied, feeling a bit defensive.

"I came to check on the school," Mrs. Wilson said. "I was worried about what might happen."

Eileen looked at her teacher for a moment, then said, "I didn't do anything. Not really."

Mrs. Wilson raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't hurt anyone," Eileen said, feeling suddenly very small. "I just... wanted them to see things the way I do."

Mrs. Wilson walked over to Eileen and put a hand on her shoulder. "I understand that, Eileen. But you can't force people to see things your way. You have to show them."

"How?" Eileen asked, feeling a bit lost.

"By being an example," Mrs. Wilson said. "By doing good things and inspiring others to do the same. That's how you change the world."

Eileen thought about this for a moment, then nodded. "I'll try," she said, feeling a bit hopeful.

Mrs. Wilson smiled. "I know you will," she said. "Now, let's get out of here before anyone else shows up."

Eileen smiled back and followed her teacher out of the empty school. As they walked down the street, Eileen thought about what Mrs. Wilson had said. Maybe she couldn't change the world with acid and hacking and Chinese curses. But maybe she could change it with something even more powerful: kindness.

Ending 2

Once Jennifer saw Eileen lying under her bed, she noticed something odd about her daughter's eyes. They seemed to have lost their usual sparkle, replaced with a dark and ominous gleam that sent shivers down Jennifer's spine.

As the bullying grew worse, Eileen's parents became more and more distant. They no longer knew what to do with their daughter, and the thought of her being different terrified them. They began to avoid her, locking themselves away in their room and leaving Eileen to fend for herself.

It wasn't long before Eileen's behavior grew even more disturbing. She would spend hours muttering to herself in a language no one could understand, and her notebook was filled with strange symbols and diagrams that looked like they belonged in a horror movie.

The other children at school began to fear her, and even the teachers seemed to keep their distance. But Eileen didn't seem to care. She was too busy plotting her revenge.

One night, Jennifer heard a strange noise coming from Eileen's room. She cautiously opened the door to find her daughter standing in the middle of the room, surrounded by flickering candles and chanting in that same eerie language.

When Eileen finally turned to face her mother, Jennifer saw that her daughter's eyes had turned completely black. Eileen's lips twisted into a cruel smile, and she spoke in a voice that was not her own.

"Your daughter is no longer here," the voice said. "Only I remain."

From that moment on, Eileen was no longer the little girl her parents had known. She was something else entirely, a creature of darkness and malice that delighted in causing pain and suffering to those around her.

The bullying at school became more frequent, but this time, it was Eileen who was doing the bullying. And the other children soon learned that it was far more terrifying to be on the receiving end of her wrath than it had been to be her victim.

As the years passed, Eileen's power only grew stronger, until she became a legend in her own right. People whispered her name in fear, and parents warned their children not to cross her path.

And no one ever forgot the terrifying little girl who had once been called Eileen.