

To the Orchard

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"The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives."
-Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury*.

CHARACTERS

SIMCHA BERGMAN-	50's. Surgeon. <i>Baal Teshuva</i> Modern-Orthodox Jew. RACHEL's father.
RACHEL BERGMAN-	19. SIMCHA's daughter. Brooklyn College student. Aspiring writer.
TRACIE BRAGGS-	Late 30's. African American. Feminist literature professor at Brooklyn College.
RABBI ISIDORE-	70's. Retired Orthodox Rabbi. Showing early signs of Alzheimer's.
VIRGINIA WOOLF-	Turn-of-the-century British author. Performed by the actor playing TRACIE.
ROBERT PLANT-	Aged 1970's rocker. Phantasmagoric/illusionary. Performed by the actor playing ISIDORE.
AUGUST BELMONT-	Prominent 19 th Century New York businessman. Performed by the actor playing RACHEL.

A NOTE ABOUT SETS

The setting should be simple and pared down. Leave some room for imagination.

A NOTE ABOUT DIALOGUE

/ Indicates when a character begins to speak over another character.

// Indicates when a character's lines are being spoken over.

AND ONE FINAL NOTE ABOUT TIME

The action of this play takes place over the course of one month during the thirty days of the Jewish ritual mourning of *shloshim*.

Prologue

SETTING: The present. A crisp, autumn day. On one end of the stage, TRACIE stands in front of a group of students in a dilapidated classroom at Brooklyn College. A few blocks down Bedford Avenue, and on the other end of the stage, ISIDORE begins a lesson for a small cluster of children at *D'var Torah* Day School.

TRACIE

Ok. Turn off your cell phones and turn on your minds. We've got a lot to talk about.

ISIDORE

Hello class. Thank you for inviting me today to...to. Where is this?
(Throughout both ISIDORE and TRACIE ad-lib as they interact with students).
D'var Torah Day School. Good. And since you are at *D'var Torah*, this is what I will give.

TRACIE

I'm going to betray my instincts and trust that you all completed the reading for today. What did you think?
 Speechless. That's how I was too the first time I read *To the Lighthouse*. Even though this is English 101, I want to try something a bit more complex.

ISIDORE

Nu, little *pishers* we will discuss the meaning of the Great Tree of Life. What is this? //I want you to stop and think.

TRACIE

//I want you to stop and think. Listen to your thoughts. What do the words in your head sound like? Woolf would spend hours listening to herself. Writing down the words.

ISIDORE

We will begin in the beginning. What did God create?
(Beat, eliciting student responses, etc).
 Before ice cream.
(Beat).
In the beginning. What did God create?
(Beat).
 Besides jet fighters.

(Beat).

Yes. Very good. God created the heavens and the earth.

We only know so far of the earth. And he created a garden. In there he made the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And the Tree of Life which was an *etrog*. Who would give it all up for an apple?

TRACIE

What Woolf does in this book is to present a discourse on perception. How can a single action can have infinite interpretations?

ISIDORE

The Tree of Life. When God, blessed be he, threw Adam and Eve from the Garden was it for *taking* of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?

(Beat).

No! It was because *he did not want* for mankind to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Life. “And the Lord God said, but now, lest man put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, he shall live forever.”

TRACIE

Remember to think of what the kitchen table looks like when you’re in the living room. Does it even exist if you not looking at it?

ISIDORE

Would you like this, little *pishers*, to live forever? Not me. Forever is a long time. Longer than the time until your birthday.

TRACIE

Let’s do a thought experiment.

ISIDORE

Because we do not have of the Tree of Life you will live your lives and then they will end. We must think: who will we leave the world to?

TRACIE

(Throughout the next sequence TRACIE and ISIDORE both begin to approach one another at the center of the stage, though they should not recognize the others’ presence).

On my way to class I picked a branch off a tree.

(Takes out a branch).

I said a little apology to it. Told it it was better off giving up a limb for the sake of understanding the laws of perception than becoming an accounting textbook. Now: I want you to tell me. What is it you think of when you see this branch?

(Beats as necessary as students answer, etc.).

Yes, a branch. Very original.

Ok, yeah. The oak trees on your avenue growing up. That's better.

What else?

ISIDORE

I leave this to you. To carry on. For this you must do the best with what you have. You must protect your family. You must lead the life of righteousness.

TRACIE

When I see it I think of the trees along the Charles River in Boston, where I went to school.

ISIDORE

Make amends because someday you will be at an end.

TRACIE

I think of sitting under those branches reading... it reminds me why I've strove for something. It reminds me why I've always tried to *keep moving*.

ISIDORE

For you, today I brought a special gift.

(Checks pockets).

TRACIE

Sometimes if you don't keep going, the weeds and the underbrush and all that... nature stuff, they just grow up around you til the daylight is all gone.

ISIDORE

Maybe I have forgotten it?

TRACIE

We'll just put it on the table for awhile while we think about that.

ISIDORE

Ah, here. I have left it on the table.

(ISIDORE takes the branch from TRACIE).

Such a precious thing should not be left here. I have brought you a branch from The Tree of Life, *mayn kinder*.

(Interacting with students, etc.).

Why, yes, it *is* from the Garden of Eden. No, I can't tell you where it is. But it is not far from the Coney Island. We are nearing the time of *Rosh Hashanah*, the new year. We remember each year that life is short. We must remember to work for the future

generations. This I believe. But part of this work towards the future is in remembrance. The tree reminds you to put roots down. Remember who you are.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

A few days later. SIMCHA's living room in Midwood, Brooklyn. *Downstage right* lies a dining table. Behind that there is a stairway to the second floor. *Upstage left* the main entryway is seen. In the background there is a sliding glass door. It's raining outside, and a graying *etrog* tree is visible in the backyard. SIMCHA, wearing a suit and a black yarmulke, and RACHEL wearing a skirt and long sleeve shirt enter from the front door.

SIMCHA

This place is a disaster. It's good we're not having it here.

RACHEL

Maybe now we'll have a chance to clean up.

(She begins to mindlessly clean at first, then she becomes more determined as the scene progresses).

SIMCHA

Out there's bad too. Even the tree looks dead.

RACHEL

Looks can be deceptive. The tree *is* dead.

SIMCHA

Too much water.

RACHEL

You asked me to water it.

SIMCHA

In *July*.

RACHEL

Well, I've been watering it every day. Like you asked.

SIMCHA

It's been raining all week.

RACHEL

I was only doing what you told me to do. Growing an *etrog* in *Brooklyn* was a bad idea from the start. They're supposed to grow in the desert.

SIMCHA

No. You're supposed to eat them for dessert.

RACHEL

Not funny.

SIMCHA

You make jam with them. Then you jam out.
(*Plays air guitar*).

RACHEL

Somewhat funny.

SIMCHA

(*beat*)
She always liked the orchard.

RACHEL

It's not an orchard.

SIMCHA

You're right. We could use some cleaning. We could... you know. Some of this junk. I don't even know how it got here.

RACHEL

Someone must have put it here.

SIMCHA

Who someone? Me?

RACHEL

Me. You. Her.

SIMCHA

She wasn't putting anything anywhere.

RACHEL

Ok. You.

SIMCHA

Well, I'm never here.

RACHEL

No need to remind me.

SIMCHA

Can we...not do this now. We have to go sit.

RACHEL

I can't believe you're having it there.

SIMCHA

It was nice of him to offer. Get whatever you need and let's get over there.

RACHEL

I'm not going.

SIMCHA

Don't be ridiculous.

RACHEL

I've got to clean. I have school tomorrow. I'm weeks behind. I have a meeting with Professor Braggs, and I have to--

SIMCHA

--You won't sit *Shiva* for your own mother but you'll prance off to meet your teacher to talk about...about homosexual writers who--

RACHEL

--I've been sitting *with* her for the last *six* months. I could make an appointment with Tracie and she'd be there. If I wanted to see you, Dr. Bergman, I'd have to *break my arm* and get admitted to the emergency room.

SIMCHA

What is this? Your second class with her?

RACHEL

Yes.

SIMCHA

That's a lot.

RACHEL

Ok. Fourth.

SIMCHA

Why even take English classes? You already know how to speak English.

RACHEL

Dad—

SIMCHA

--What is this one?

RACHEL

English 101.

SIMCHA

101! Don't you have enough courses in that department to be teaching them yourself?

RACHEL

It's a requirement.

SIMCHA

But for English majors?

RACHEL

For math majors.

SIMCHA

What will people say when you don't show to this?

RACHEL

Who's going to clean this place? You?

SIMCHA

But right now?

RACHEL

I don't want to see it anymore. I want it all out.

SIMCHA

Fine. You don't have to go, alright? I'll say you're not feeling well. I just want everything to go smoothly.

RACHEL

How could it not? There's nothing left to do.

SIMCHA

There are people to take care of. Neighbors, your uncle Irv.

RACHEL

She was the only one who needed taking care of. While I was doing that you were...gone. Absent. I've barely seen you.

SIMCHA

I've had work.

RACHEL

Work—

SIMCHA

--It was expensive to keep her at home.

RACHEL

We have more than enough.

SIMCHA

...It's funny. I'm around sick people all day. It never seemed to bother me. Then when the ones that you're closest are sick, it's like--

RACHEL

--like we were a leprosy ward/ instead of a cancer ward.

SIMCHA

//That's unfair.

RACHEL

You're unfair.

SIMCHA

I'm... sorry.

RACHEL

Easily said.

SIMCHA

I was in medical school when my dad died.

RACHEL

Always have an excuse, don't you?
(She takes on a pile of clothing that is laying on top of the couch)

SIMCHA

Let's...not. Not today. Of all days.

RACHEL

I'm...sorry. It's just- been a long time cooped up here. Only going out for school. My social skills have deteriorated.

SIMCHA

Maybe we can have a new beginning now.

RACHEL

Maybe--

SIMCHA

---I know your mother would have liked to see you...settle down--

RACHEL

--Maybe not.

SIMCHA

And so would I.

RACHEL

I don't think this is the time for this conversation.

SIMCHA

Don't you ever think about getting married to a nice boy?

RACHEL

Not--

SIMCHA

--I think about it.

RACHEL

Maybe you should marry a nice boy.

SIMCHA

Please, I'm serious.

RACHEL

So am I.

SIMCHA

I know it's cliché but I've always dreamed of walking down the aisle with--.

RACHEL

--Dad—

SIMCHA

--You know, like in the movies. Then there'll be grandkids. Think of that. And of course, you wouldn't have to worry about money. Even if you married a poor scholar. You would like that. The bookish-Yeshiva type. A real *Litvak*--

RACHEL

--Have you listened to a word I've said the last six years?

SIMCHA

I would always make sure you have everything you need. Can you see it? We'll be happy Noodle. No more death. You could live in the neighborhood- you could even live here--

RACHEL

-We would be like the Jewish *All in the Family*. 'Goes without saying you'd be Archie. While I, on the other hand, would subvert the formula and play Michael. I'd make a fine Michael. He was kind of a wimp, though.

SIMCHA

Why do you have to be like that?

RAHCEL

Like *what*?

SIMCHA

Like- I don't know. I just want to go back to the way things were with us.

RACHEL

It will never go back to the way it was.

SIMCHA

But us?

RACHEL

It's time to make some changes around here. —

SIMCHA

I should have been here more.

RACHEL

(Beat)

You should go to *shiva*. Let's talk about this later.

(She comes across something in the pile).

Oh, do you remember this?

(She holds up a summer dress- frum but not too much).

SIMCHA

Um...

RACHEL

No lying.

SIMCHA

Then no.

RACHEL

At the park. The wedding for that loser down the street.

SIMCHA

Itzak was no loser. I always thought maybe you and he—

RACHEL

He used to look up girls' skirts. He's a total loser.

SIMCHA

He is a nice young—oh. Wait. I do remember...She looked—

Good. RACHEL

Yeah, before the cancer. She still had some weight. SIMCHA

Too much you said. RACHEL

I said no such thing. SIMCHA

Shh. Just look. Wasn't she— RACHEL

--She should have worn that dress more often.
(He embraces her as she holds the dress).
She looked...lovely. Like when she was young. SIMCHA

That's sweet, Dad. Even though you don't mean it. RACHEL

I do. SIMCHA

Dad, do you love me? RACHEL

Of course. SIMCHA

Good. You're going to need to remember that. RACHEL

What does that mean? SIMCHA

I'm going to clean up here.
(Beat). RACHEL

So much secrecy with you— SIMCHA

RACHEL

--You're the one who's gone for unexplainable hours on end.

SIMCHA

I go for drives.

RACHEL

So you've said. Listen, you'd better get to Izzy's. They'll be waiting by now.

SIMCHA

(beat).

This conversation is not over.

RACHEL

You're right about that.

SIMCHA

(Going to door).

Did you notice you left the door open?

RACHEL

Oh. So I did.

(Beat. He exits.)

End Scene

Scene 2

SETTING:

A few days later. SPLIT SCENE: TRACIE's Brooklyn College English Dept. office. TRACIE is seated. Behind her is a bookcase with heavy books on literature, theory, etc. Also... ISIDORE'S house. SIMCHA and ISIDORE sit quietly eating at the table.

TRACIE

(At rise is making tea at the helm of an elaborate tea set)

--these Modernist tendencies also work to counter measures of gender long held dear by the now rapidly dissolving forces of the Late Victorian era. Woolf herself reflects on this break in saying that, in or about 1910, human character changed forever.

(Laughs as she cuts the lemon in half. Beat).

What was I saying?

RACHEL

I don't know.

(TRACIE cuts the lemon again. She places the quarter on RACHELS' plate.

RACHEL appears startled)

TRACIE

What's the matter? Don't like lemon?

RACHEL

No. I mean yes.

TRACIE

Can you imagine what the world would be like if it stopped being the way it was forever?

RACHEL

Yeah.

TRACIE

I'm boring you.

RACHEL

No, I could listen to you talk all day.

TRACIE

Lucky thing you have to. Sugar?

RACHEL

Please.

TRACIE

You're the only one of my students who keeps an appointment, anyways. It's been what, two weeks?

RACHEL

You've been hard to get lately.

TRACIE

Sorry to break our little *Tuesdays with Morrie* routine.

RACHEL

And I'm sorry I didn't make last week. I had a family...engagement. I only managed to get out of some of it.

TRACIE

I would have had to cancel anyway. You wanted to talk about your paper?

RACHEL

Oh yeah. The paper.

TRACIE

Got so many folks deconstructin' around here. Somebody's gotta come 'round and put everything back together, Rachel girl.

(TRACIE *pronounces the name RACHEL in Standard American*).

RACHEL

Didn't I tell you? I changed my name. Call me Lily.

TRACIE

You want to rename yourself after a character in *To the Lighthouse*?

ISIDORE

Good soup.

SIMCHA

Thanks

ISIDORE

Made it yourself?

SIMCHA

All the food was gone and no one else was around.

ISIDORE

I gave Juanita the week off for the *yontiff*.

SIMCHA

She's not Jewish.

ISIDORE

But very nice nonetheless. What do you call it?

SIMCHA

What?

ISIDORE

Terrible name for soup.

SIMCHA

Oh. Uh...

(Reading label)

“Instant Noodle.”

(They continue eating in silence, occasionally anticipating conversation).

RACHEL

Lily Briscoe just *does it* for me. She’s so well-written. What was Woolf like?

TRACIE

I hesitate to enter into a probably unimportant Greenblattesque New Historicist—

(Beat).

She was a lady with a lot of baggage.

RACHEL

Because she was gay?

TRACIE

She had a relationship with another woman.

RACHEL

What is that like?

TRACIE

What?

RACHEL

What was *it* like?

TRACIE

(Beat).

Vita Sackville-West. Woolf wrote *Orlando* about her. One critic called it “the longest love letter ever written.” They ran away together. To Paris.

RACHEL
What happened?

TRACIE
Their husbands went off to Paris to get ‘em.

RACHEL
At least they tried.

TRACIE
What does your family say about you wanting to change your name?

RACHEL
My father, you know... the traditional Jewish father-figure. He didn’t like it. He called me “Lilith.”

TRACIE
Maybe he’ll come around.

RACHEL
He won’t.

TRACIE
I’m sorry.
(*Beat*).
And your mother?

RACHEL
(*Beat*).
I didn’t tell her.

TRACIE
I thought you two were closer than that.

RACHEL
We were.

TRACIE
What does--

RACHEL
--I can, you know.

Excuse me?

TRACIE

You asked me if I could imagine what it would be like if the world stopped being the way it was forever.

RACHEL

What would it be like?

TRACIE

Wonderful.

RACHEL

Yes?

TRACIE

And terrifying. To run away like Virginia did. With Vita.

RACHEL

Maybe they weren't running *away*.

TRACIE

To get out--

RACHEL

--Sometimes you've got to run just to keep up when everyone else is doing the same.

TRACIE

My father would disown me if I ran away like that. He would probably say *kaddish* twice.

RACHEL

Twice?

TRACIE

As a precaution.

RACHEL

From what you've told me I don't think he could be that heartless.

TRACIE

RACHEL

He has a firm sense of right and wrong. Either you're right, or you're everyone but him. Even he doesn't qualify by his standards anymore.

ISIDORE

Yes. Well. Very good speaking with you. But you see, so much conversation makes me tired. *Nu*. I have errands to take care of before *yom kippur*—

SIMCHA

--Thank you. For having *shiva* here.

ISIDORE

Shiva? Oh. Yes. You asked.

SIMCHA

I did.

ISIDORE

Sam—

SIMCHA

--It's Rachel. She's barely been here. For *shiva*. I've barely seen her all week. She's up to something.

ISIDORE

The youth now. Always up to something. "What is up?" They ask? "*Up?*" I say, "*God is up.*"

RACHEL

When I was little...we had this immense old Maple tree out back. Sometimes, at night, the moon would make these shadows of the branches in my room. They looked like arms.

TRACIE

What were they doing?

RACHEL

I thought that they would grab me and put me into the ground.

TRACIE

And now?

RACHEL

Like they almost have me.

TRACIE

And if you don't run like hell—

RACHEL

--They'll take me forever. But then Mom would come. She used to sing me this crazy song about a glimmering gold lady. I would think of that glimmering and the shadow would go away.

TRACIE

Sometimes the world grabs you. And shakes you. Rachel, I've—

RACHEL

--Lily.

TRACIE

I've got some news, Lily. You're going to hear it sooner than later, so it might as well be from me.

RACHEL

The book is getting published?

TRACIE

Audre Lorde? No. She's going to have to keep waiting to get her day.

(She picks up a notebook off the desk)

Five years on the same damned thing. She lived her politics. Real, applied social change. I can't even seem to write about it, let alone live it.

RACHEL

But I see your politics in class. It really has changed the way //I think about things.

TRACIE

/ This may be my last semester at Brooklyn College.

ISIDORE

Now Rachel. A beautiful woman she was. A good family. Money.

SIMCHA

Uh...

ISIDORE

I remember when you came with her to me. You still had the drip from your nose. But she was lovely. You were lucky, to think of where you had been.

SIMCHA

No, Rabbi. That was my wife Rive. I'm talking about Rachel.

ISIDORE

Yes—

SIMCHA

My daughter.

ISIDORE

Yes...

SIMCHA

She's been acting *strange*—no. *Stranger* lately.

RACHEL

You got a job somewhere else?

TRACIE

Not exactly.

RACHEL

What the fuck? You're the only professor I like here.

TRACIE

And you, my dear are one of my favorite students.

RACHEL

Why?

TRACIE

You ever been to the Belmont?

RACHEL

The horse race?

TRACIE

You know there ain't nothing better than a day at the races. Except of course when your horse don't come in. Sometimes you pick a Trojan.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

TRACIE

I went in front of the tenure board.

RACHEL

Is that where--

TRACIE

--Where stodgy old men in leather chairs emblazoned with the university seal tell you if you need to re-apply for food stamps.

RACHEL

When?

TRACIE

Yesterday. Do you like your tea?

RACHEL

And they said you were fired?

TRACIE

They told me they were "considering opening my position at the end of the semester-depending on the recommendations of students and other faculty."

RACHEL

Why would they do that?

TRACIE

Budget cuts. The inevitable contraction of the pluralistic bubble. The disappearing American Academic. Make room in the budget for an alumni Jacuzzi. Take your pick.

RACHEL

Oh.

TRACIE

Nine years of schooling and two years on the job search. What do I get? \$40,000 and a half-observed view of Bedford Ave. After three years of teaching 18-year-olds how to use a comma they call you into their little office, offer you a cup of Dunkin' Donuts

coffee, and tell you if you can afford to keep renting, or you need to move in with your mammy.

RACHEL

Is there anything I can do?

TRACIE

I need you to write me a letter of support. Those kind of things from students help a lot. Especially someone as familiar with me as you.

RACHEL

I'll write the best letter you've ever seen.

TRACIE

I always thought I'd end up back at Harvard, not fighting to keep a job down the street from the block I grew up on.

ISIDORE

Many years it's been since you've asked me for advice, *boychie*.

SIMCHA

I'm not really asking for--

ISIDORE

--Your father came to me for advice too—

SIMCHA

--I just want to talk to someone and you—

ISIDORE

Your father came many times. Now you come. I should charge rates like the psychoanalysts. More Jews go to psychoanalysts than Rabbis. Maybe I change my title and they'll come back?

SIMCHA

It's a very different kind of train--

ISIDORE

--Your father comes to my office, very angry. He says, "Rabbi. My ingrate is leaving the medical school. He wants to be a musician."

SIMCHA

Like Robert Plant.

ISIDORE

A rock and roll musician. What is this? “Hefty copper?”

SIMCHA

Heavy Metal.

ISIDORE

And this German blimp you liked so much?

SIMCHA

Led Zeppelin? I know the story.

ISIDORE

It’s been a long time since then.—

SIMCHA

--Since I rock and rolled. Been a long lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely time.

RACHEL

Do you need anything? Company...

TRACIE

Just the letter would help. Thanks.

(Beat).

It’s still raining. News said the power’s out in half of Brooklyn.

RACHEL

Maybe God’s angry.

TRACIE

Maybe it’s a new beginning.

RACHEL

I don’t think so.

TRACIE

Tell me what on earth would God be angry about? That you want to change your name?

RACHEL

I’ve been making people unhappy who seem to have good...connections... with God.

Your father? TRACIE

I wanted to tell you something...I-- RACHEL

Rachel— TRACIE

Lily. RACHEL

Lily, did you come here to talk about *To the Lighthouse*? TRACIE

I've been--My mom... TRACIE

What is it? TRACIE

She's... RACHEL

Yes? TRACIE

...she's upset. So is my dad. He's really...upset. RACHEL

Because-- TRACIE

--I just want-- RACHEL
(She takes TRACIE'S HAND)
 --I want to get out. But my dad, he seems miserable. I'm all he has left.

He has your mother— TRACIE

RACHEL

-- And now I think I'm going to move out on him.

TRACIE

Well. That's OK. You're practically- nearly a grown woman.

(Beat)

Don't you have anyone to talk to?

RACHEL

I have friends, but to tell you the truth, you're what really keeps me going.

RACHEL

I mean, you...as a teacher. A really...good teacher. Professor.

TRACIE

Thank you, Rachel. Put it in the letter!

(Beat).

RACHEL

Hey, do you still have that stuffed horse I got you for Christmas?

TRACIE

Mr. Ed? I don't think he made it through my most recent move. Got cancelled from syndication.

RACHEL

That's too bad.

(Beat).

But if I *really* left. The way I need to- he would never speak to me again.

SIMCHA

If I told you that I needed advice would you let me speak?

ISIDORE

...This is a possibility.

SIMCHA

She's hiding something.

RACHEL

Is it so selfish to want this for myself?

TRACIE
 No, baby. It's not so bad.

RACHEL
 I'm going to do something horrible

TRACIE
 Leaving...

RACHEL
 ... to be an artist. To be a writer. Like Virginia Woolf.

TRACIE
 She had a few advantages you don't have.

RACHEL
 And you.
(Beat)
 There's another reason why I have to leave home.
(RACHEL leans in and places her hand on TRACIE's.)

TRACIE
 Maybe you can see a counselor about--

RACHEL
 --I think you know why.
(RACHEL reaches her hand up to TRACIE's face. She pushes back her hair.. TRACIE pulls away, startled).

SIMCHA
 I think she has a boyfriend.

ISIDORE
 Who is he? It may not be a bad thing. Love is—

SIMCHA
 It is a bad thing if he's not *Jewish*.

ISIDORE
 Why do you think she would do this?

SIMCHA

Because she's like me.

TRACIE

You can't do that, sugar. That ain't allowed.

RACHEL

I mean, you feel that way, right?

TRACIE

I can't have this discussion.

RACHEL

(Moving closer).

I thought maybe I could talk to you about—

TRACIE

--Rachel. Lily. You've // crossed the line.

RACHEL

/I didn't even know these were feelings existed until I had your class. It's confusing. I feel like this is right. Like you're right. But I need to be sure. I understand—

(Reaches to touch her hand).

TRACIE

--I want you to understand so you don't get the wrong idea. I *feel* for you honey. But now you have a letter to write and I have a job to defend.

RACHEL

Screw the letter! I need to *talk* to you. You're not like everyone else.

TRACIE

I am a black woman in the middle of my life, trying to keep a job that it looks like I might lose. Do you understand?

SIMCHA

You don't think...she'd *marry* without my permission do you?

ISIDORE

You say she's like you?

SIMCHA

Yes.

ISIDORE

Then yes.

SIMCHA

How can I keep her at home for long enough to show her what's best for her?

ISIDORE

I enjoy presents.

SIMCHA

That's your advice?

ISIDORE

This you can't ask her?

SIMCHA

I just don't want to push her away.

ISIDORE

Why must she date a Jew?

TRACIE

I look at you and I see...

RACHEL

Yes?

TRACIE

...I see...so much. But I also see someone who is...very young. And inexperienced. Someone who hasn't seen life. Loss. And I see someone who is my student. And that I can't have this discussion. Not now. You need to go.

SIMCHA

That's what we *do*, right? Date, marry, Jews.

ISIDORE

Maybe you must answer this question for yourself, first.

SIMCHA

I'll tell you one thing, whatever she's *doing*, I'm going to find out. And I'm going to put a stop to it. Presents! Ha.

(Beat. A realization).

Presents.

RACHEL

Yes, but...you always give me that *look* in class.

TRACIE

No. *That look* is not *that look*. It's the look of...gratitude. Not the look of love. Don't confuse your looks, child. Especially not around one of those aging Dickens scholars down the hall. Those *looks* are the only reason they don't retire.

RACHEL

I can be quiet about it.

TRACIE

You can quietly shut the door as you leave, Rachel.

RACHEL

Call me Lily.

(She runs out, shutting the door).

TRACIE

Shit.

(Beat. She takes a small stuffed horse out of the bottom of her desk).

Sweet girl, why'd you have to go and ruin it?

End Scene

Scene 3

SETTING:

A few days later. The Bergman's house. RACHEL has fallen asleep on the sofa, a notepad at her side. The lights are low.

RACHEL

(Enter VIRGINIA. She begins to poke about. RACHEL, startled, wakes up).

Are you Professor Braggs?

VIRGINIA

I'm Virginia Woolf. Who do I look like? George Eliot?
(VIRGINIA is played by the actor playing TRACIE).

RACHEL

I didn't know Virginia Woolf was black.

VIRGINIA

You got a lot to learn.

RACHEL

What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA

I'm looking for a Goddamn crumpet. What does it look like?
What are *you* doing here?

RACHEL

I'm waiting for my dad. I don't know what to say to him- if I should really go. I just don't know about *this*. I'm not even packed.

VIRGINIA

You've got to take it easy.

RACHEL

Why are the lights out?

VIRGINIA

They're like that on the whole block. Must be the storm.

RACHEL

What's that?
(Indicates behind her offstage).

VIRGINIA

She's the horse I rode in on. Got her at the track. A trainer had just lost big on her. Sold her real cheap. She's a nice breed. Sometimes you pick a filly. Even when everyone else has given up on you.

RACHEL

Pinch me.

VIRGINIA

We've only just met.

RACHEL

If you can't feel it, you're dreaming.

VIRGINIA

That's disappointing. Somebody always 'gotta be dreaming in order to meet people nowadays. Sometimes a cigar is really just a pomegranate. Maybe I'm just *here*, uninvited, Lily.

RACHEL

You know my name. Or, my new name. Even better.

VIRGINIA

I know a few other things, too.

RACHEL

Like what?

VIRGINIA

Lie down. Let me show you.

RACHEL

But my dad may come home and I still don't know what to tell him.

VIRGINIA

Tell him the truth.

RACHEL

I don't know what the truth is.

VIRGINIA

Then tell him a lie.

RACHEL

Maybe that's what I've been doing.

VIRGINIA

That's what we do. Writers.
(*She pinches her*).

RACHEL

Ow! Whoever you are, you've *definitely* got to go. He could show up any minute.

VIRGINIA

There's time. Maybe I can help you figure things out.

RACHEL

I thought you...or who you remind me of, didn't want anything to do with me.

VIRGINIA

I don't know about that. But I do know that sometimes there's something that you want, and even if you really want it, you don't let yourself have it.

RACHEL

Why?

VIRGINIA

Any little number of things. But sometimes, the clouds part and there is an opening. And then, you gotta take it. You don't get too many moments in the sun.

RACHEL

Maybe we can just hold hands. I haven't done this before. But I like that you're here. Even though you're not *quite* who I thought you were.

VIRGINIA

You ain't Vita yourself.

RACHEL

What's it like?

VIRGINIA

What's who like?

RACHEL

To be an artist? To be with a woman? To be you?

VIRGINIA

Whoa. Easy. To be an artist you gotta make yourself a little room. To be with a woman is like a trip to a foreign country...but when you get there you find yourself at home.

RACHEL

I don't like that.

VIRGINIA

You got nowhere else. No matter how far you go.

RACHEL

I need to find out if these feelings I have are true. But I didn't think you—

VIRGINIA

Shh. Don't talk.

RACHEL

What's it like to be you?

VIRGINIA

It's like crossing a river every day. Every day it gets deeper.

RACHEL

Where are you going?

VIRGINIA

I can show you where I been. Let your hair fall back all around your head.

(She reaches as if to turn off the lights. Slow fade. RACHEL moans. Lights).

End Scene

END OF SAMPLE. SAMPLE NOT INTENDED FOR PRODUCTION OR
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