

To the Orchard

By: Les Hunter

National Foundation for Jewish Culture New Play Development Grant

Les Hunter
leslielarshunter@gmail.com
(917) 584-6392

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. Gender Studies 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 1970s 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

Sets 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 second half the month during the thirty days of the Jewish ritual mourning of *shloshim*.

Prologue

SETTING: Autumn, the present. Brooklyn, NY. 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 your cell phones off and turn your minds on. 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? *(No response.)* 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 jet fighters.
(Beat).
In the beginning. What did God create?
(Beat).
 Before ice cream.

(Beat).

Yes. Very good. God created the heavens and the earth. We only know so far of the earth. And he created a garden.

TRACIE

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

ISIDORE

There he made two trees: 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? 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, ‘if 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

Was it then knowledge that man—or, or woman wanted? No. It was the life that was wanted. 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

When we go, we must think: who do 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 the ground.

(Takes out a branch).

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 trees on your street growing up. What else?

ISIDORE

This I leave for you to carry on.

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 always worked 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 gone.

ISIDORE

Maybe I have forgotten it?

TRACIE

We'll just put it here for awhile while we think about that.

ISIDORE

Ah, here. I have left it.

(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 must remember to work for the future. But part of this work is in to remember. The tree reminds you to put roots down. Remember who you are.

ACT IScene 1

SETTING:

A few days later. SIMCHA's disheveled living room in Midwood, Brooklyn. *Downstage right* there is 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.

This place is a disaster.

SIMCHA

Maybe I'll clean up.

RACHEL

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

Even the tree looks dead.

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

Too much water.

SIMCHA

You asked me to water it.

RACHEL

In *July*. When there isn't enough rain.

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

SIMCHA

It's been raining all week.

RACHEL

I was only doing what you told me to do. Who grows an *etrog* in *Brooklyn*? They're supposed to grow in the desert, right.

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

Not true. And not funny.

SIMCHA

Yes it is. You make them into jam. 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.

Ok. You.

RACHEL

Well, I'm never here.

SIMCHA

No need to remind me.

RACHEL

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

SIMCHA

I can't believe you're not having it here.

RACHEL

And have people see this mess? It looks like the Cheap Buys bin at Filene's Basement. It's better this way. (*Notices the time.*) Hey, we've got to go.

SIMCHA

I'm not going.

RACHEL

Don't be ridiculous.

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

--You won't sit *shiva* for your own mother but you'll prance off to meet your teacher to talk about...about degenerate artists who--

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

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

SIMCHA

Who's going to clean this place? You?

SIMCHA

At this very minute?

RACHEL

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

SIMCHA

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

Mr. Rage can take care of himself.

SIMCHA

He can't, Rachel.

RACHEL

Mom 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 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
I know I was not ... exemplary in your mother's last months. But she knew I loved her.
She never doubted that. I know it.

RACHEL
You told her that.

SIMCHA
I've told her that.

RACHEL
Recently?

SIMCHA
We made our peace. We had our reasons, OK. Reasons that you don't have to know about.

RACHEL
I don't get to know about your reasons?

SIMCHA

Let's...not... do this today.

RACHEL

It's just--been a long time cooped up here.

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 sickness. 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

With 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*.

(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

Tzvi 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—

RACHEL

Good.

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

Too much you said.

SIMCHA

I said no such thing.

RACHEL

Shh. Just look. Wasn't she—

SIMCHA

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

RACHEL

That's sweet, Dad.

SIMCHA

It's true.

RACHEL

Dad, do you love me?

SIMCHA

You know the answer to that.

RACHEL

Remember that.

SIMCHA

What does that mean?

RACHEL

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

SIMCHA

So much secrecy with you—

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 RACHEL'S 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 and put everything back together, Rachel.

(TRACIE pronounces the name RACHEL in Standard American).

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

TRACIE
 You—

RACHEL
 --want to rename myself after a character in *To the Lighthouse*. Is it too much?

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 do you--

RACHEL

--I can, you know.

TRACIE

Excuse me?

RACHEL

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

TRACIE

What would it be like?

RACHEL

Wonderful.

TRACIE
 Yes?

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

TRACIE
 Maybe they weren't running *away*.

RACHEL
 To get out--

TRACIE
 --Sometimes you've got to run just to keep up.

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

TRACIE
 Twice?

RACHEL
 As a precaution.

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

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. I've hardly 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

Mom was easier to talk to. When I was little...we had this big 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 gold lady. That made the shadow go away.

TRACIE

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

RACHEL

--Lily.

TRACIE

I've got some news, Lily.

RACHEL

The book is getting published?

TRACIE

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. Lorde 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. And you saved her, you know. From that other set-up that—

SIMCHA

--No, Rabbi. That was my wife Rive. (*"Rive" rhymes with "privy"*). 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 are one of my favorite students.

RACHEL

Why?

TRACIE

You ever been to the Belmont?

RACHEL

The horse race?

TRACIE

You know there's nothing better than a day at the races. I used to go, when I was a kid. My father, he took me. It wasn't really for me so much as it was for him. Anyway, entering academia is a lot like betting on horses.

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 can keep your job, or you need to apply for food stamps.

When? RACHEL

Last week. TRACIE

Why didn't you tell me? RACHEL

You haven't been around. Do you like your tea? TRACIE

And they said you were fired? RACHEL

They told me they were "considering opening my position at the end of the semester-
depending on the recommendations of students and other faculty." I have to defend my
job. Vigorously, and soon, or it's over. TRACIE

Why would they do that? RACHEL

Budget cuts. The corporatization of the University. The expansion of the Overfed
Administrative Class. The inevitable contraction of the pluralistic bubble. The
disappearing American Academic. Make room in the budget for an alumni Jacuzzi. Take
your pick. TRACIE

Oh. RACHEL

Also I didn't finish my book. Three peer-reviewed articles does not a tenure case make.
The problem is: you're not *supposed* to care about teaching. But I do. TRACIE

And I love that about you. RACHEL

TRACIE

Nine years of schooling and two years on the job search. What do I get? \$40,000 and a half-obscured 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 mother.

RACHEL

That's awful.

TRACIE

I have massive amounts of material to prepare. I'll be here all night before tomorrow's meeting.

RACHEL

Is there anything I can do?

TRACIE

I'd love you to write me a letter of support. Those kind of things from students help a lot.

RACHEL

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

TRACIE

I never thought I'd end up 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, *boychic*.

SIMCHA

I'm not really asking for--

ISIDORE

--You 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 degenerate son 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?

TRACIE

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.

I don't think so.

RACHEL

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.

TRACIE

Your father?

RACHEL

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

TRACIE

Rachel—

RACHEL

Lily.

TRACIE

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

TRACIE

I've been--My mom...

TRACIE

What is it?

RACHEL

She's...

TRACIE

Yes?

RACHEL

...she died. Last week.

TRACIE

Oh my God. I'm so sorry. Do you want to talk about it?

RACHEL

Not really. Not yet. Can I... can I have a hug?

TRACIE

Of course.

(She goes around the desk to give her a hug. A moment.)

RACHEL

--I'm OK. Now I want to get out. But my dad, he seems miserable. I'm all he has left.

TRACIE

Well. That's OK. You're an adult. You should do as you please.

RACHEL

It's not that easy when you grow up the way I did.

TRACIE

I know it's hard to let go of the past and move on.

(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. 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. 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. That's not allowed.

RACHEL

I mean, you feel that way, right?

TRACIE

I know you're upset right now.

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 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—

TRACIE

--I want you to understand so you don't get the wrong idea. I *feel* for you, honey. Meaning: I know you're having a bad time. And we've spent a lot of time together in this office talking about books, because I care about you *as a student*. And I can see how you might confuse my care with other forms of care, but let me be clear: this cannot be.

RACHEL

But the way you—

TRACIE

--Now. I am going to *pretend* for your sake *and mine* that this did not happen. So we can move on, and make things *good* between us. I would like that. Don't worry about the letter, but I have a job to defend.

RACHEL

I need to *talk* to you. You're not like everyone else.

TRACIE

I am a black woman in the middle of my life, after many, many years of schooling, trying to keep a job that it looks like I might lose. And you are my student. 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?

RACHEL

When you look at me, what do you see?

TRACIE

...I see...so much. But I also see someone who is...very young. And I see someone who is my student. And that I can't have this discussion. Not now.

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 male 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).

Mr. Ed. Why do we do the things we do?

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 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. Name's Mr. Ed. 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).

End Scene

Scene 4

SETTING: Same as before. RACHEL, enters *stage right* with luggage bags and a large basket of clean laundry

she places on the dining room table. She begins to fold the clothing into the suitcase.

SIMCHA

Rachel! It's time to go to the orchard!

RACHEL

(Quickly hiding clothing/suitcases under the table. On mistake, she leaves out a sock. She takes out a pad of stationary and begins to write on it).

You're home.

SIMCHA

Get your coat on.

RACHEL

I'm busy.

SIMCHA

(SIMCHA hams it up, speaking with a stereotypical Eastern European Jewish Yiddish accent).

But, my lovely. Ze etrogs.

RACHEL

I have too much to do--

SIMCHA

-- Ve must collect them to perform the *Sukkos mitvah*.

RACHEL

Okay, Tevye, that's kind of annoying.

SIMCHA

Is it not the way my father spoke?

RACHEL

You're in a better mood.

SIMCHA

(Now in "regular voice").

I'm trying--

RACHEL

--I'm glad.

SIMCHA

Let's do this.

RACHEL

I don't have time right now.

SIMCHA

You used to love singing in the *succah*.

RACHEL

Well I don't anymore. OK?

SIMCHA

(Noticing notebook on the table).

Writing?

RACHEL

I was.

(He picks it up)

SIMCHA

(Reading)

"It seemed so real. When she came to me I started to realize—

RACHEL

--Hey! That's my journal!

(She takes it away).

SIMCHA

What is that you were writing?

RACHEL

Literary analysis.

SIMCHA

Sounds useful. Something you can get a job with.

RACHEL

Isn't that what *male* Torah scholars do all day? *And* get supported by the community to do it? Isn't that what the *midrash* is? Interpretation?

SIMCHA
Oh boy. Change of subject!
(Beat)
I have something for you.

RACHEL
Did you learn to wash your own boxers?

SIMCHA
Ha-ha. It's a gift. In a way.
(Beat)
It's a blessing.

RACHEL
Why not take me out for lunch?

SIMCHA
It's also your mother's inheritance.

RACHEL
Forget lunch.

SIMCHA
She left it to me, but I think you can use it better than I can.

RACHEL
What's the catch?

SIMCHA
There's no catch.

RACHEL
Well. That's generous of you Dad.

SIMCHA
Just live a simple life in the way that God and your family want you to.

RACHEL
So that's the catch.

SIMCHA
That's no catch. That's just a request.

RACHEL
 And if I choose to live...

SIMCHA
 Un-simply? Then you live a complicated life.

RACHEL
 Meaning?

SIMCHA
 Let me give you this. You're how old I was when my dad died. I was a constant disappointment to him—

RACHEL
 --I'm a constant disappointment?

SIMCHA
 You've been all I could ask for. So far anyways.
(Beat).
 That was a joke.

RACHEL
 What if I stopped being all you could ask for?

SIMCHA
 I *could* give it to the neighbor's kid...
(Beat)
 You were doing laundry?

RACHEL
 Do I look like I'm doing laundry?

SIMCHA
(Picks up sock. Makes a sock puppet that says:)
 WHO'S SOCK AM I?

RACHEL
 You're...Mom's?

SIMCHA
(Notices bags).
 Why are these bags out?
(Sock puppet voice:)

AM I GOING SOMEWHERE?

RACHEL

They're...some of mom's old things. I was going to donate it.

SIMCHA

(Quits with the sock).

Nobody wants stuff that belongs to someone who's passed.

RACHEL

It's time to get rid of some things.

(Takes out laundry, bags, and begins to fold clothing into the suitcase).

SIMCHA

It's just that, sometimes, I like to look at it. You know, take it out.

RACHEL

Well, that's morbid. I don't like it.

SIMCHA

It's not yours to give away.

RACHEL

I need to straighten up around here.

SIMCHA

You vacuumed?

RAHCEL

Everything's ready to go.

SIMCHA

Where to?

RACHEL

(beat).

Now that she's gone. It's just that—

SIMCHA

--Just that.

RACHEL

How come you never tell me what you were like when you were my age?

SIMCHA

It was all very boring until you arrived. That's the most exciting part.

RACHEL

What would you say if I told you I wanted something else?

(She resumes packing)

SIMCHA

I told you you don't need to pack anymore.

RACHEL

I have lots to pack.

(She takes a moment).

I'm moving out of the house, dad. I'm sorry.

SIMCHA

(Pause).

God doesn't forbid it.

RACHEL

Good to know.

SIMCHA

But I do. Those bags--

RACHEL

--Aren't mom's stuff.

(Zips them).

SIMCHA

I told you before: meet a nice boy, settle down if you want out so bad.

RACHEL

That's what *you* want for me.

SIMCHA

But you have no where to go. You can't have that much money.

RACHEL

I'm going to stay with friends from school for a while.

SIMCHA

Who?

RACHEL
 No one you know.

SIMCHA
 What happened to your old friends? They were *nice*.

RACHEL
 Does *nice* mean Jewish?

SIMCHA
 It would have broken your mother's heart.

RACHEL
 Mom understood me. We could talk.

SIMCHA
 Stay close to your roots, like my little *etrog*.

RACHEL
 Trees grow.
(Beat).
 I left you a list of the neighbors' cook's numbers. So that way you don't go hungry... You need to learn how to take care of yourself, Dad.

SIMCHA
(Beat).
 Me? You know nothing about the world.

RACHEL
 That's something I'd like to change.
(Car horn).
 The cab is here to pick me up.
(Goes back to packing).

SIMCHA
 Leaving will only bring you trouble.

RACHEL
 I have to find that out for myself.

SIMCHA
 I try to be lenient. Do you see where it gets me?

(*Angry*).
 You'll stay here.
 (*Stands in front of door*).

RACHEL
 Are you going to *force* me to stay?
 (*Walks towards door-pause- SIMCHA stands aside, defeated*).

SIMCHA
 (*Crossing to center*)
 If you go, my happiness is gone.
 (*RACHEL comes back towards him. Stops. Considers. Does not answer.*)

RACHEL
 I'm not leaving because I hate you. I stayed for your rules. I can't stay for your guilt.

SIMCHA
 Where do these friends live?

RACHEL
 Manhattan. On Orchard Street.

SIMCHA
 The Lower East Side is a terrible place. I should know: I was born there.

RACHEL
 There's lots of *diversity*. There are also lots of artists.

SIMCHA
 The writing thing.

RACHEL
 I can't do that here. And I have some other things to figure out.

SIMCHA
 Will you be back?

RACHEL
 I don't know.

SIMCHA
 Then you can't have my blessing. Or anything that comes with it.

RACHEL

(She comes to him, but he turns on her. She hesitates, then walks to the front door).

I want that. More than the money. But I need this. It's a good start for me.

(Beat).

I'll be back tomorrow morning to pick up a few more things after I go to class.

SIMCHA

Noodle. You're all I have left.

RACHEL

You are my family, dad. But I need my space now.

SIMCHA

I can't be alone.

(Beat. Car horn honks twice)

RACHEL

Listen—

SIMCHA

--If you're going to leave just go.

RACHEL

I'll see you...later.

(She leaves. Pause. SIMCHA runs to front door).

SIMCHA

Rachel! When did you stop listening to your father—

(There is no answer. He looks out. Pause. Unexpectedly, an etrog rolls in the front door and stops at his feet. SIMCHA picks it up, examining it).

End Scene

Scene 5

SETTING:

The next day. A Belmont Park, Long Island of the mind. TRACIE'S office. She is at her desk, with her eyes closed. "Call to the Post" is heard.

Theme to "New York, New York" plays in the background. AUGUST BELMONT, performed by the actor playing RACHEL, enters).

AUGUST

Excusez-moi, mademoiselle, but I believe you presently occupy my seat.

(Beat).

Excuse me, ma'am? I'm afraid you will have to move post-haste. This is my seat.

TRACIE

'Scuse yourself. This is my fantasy. And it's better than O.T.B. I'm imagining it so I can just imagine you away.

(She shuts her eyes, concentrating. She opens them. BELMONT is still there. She puts her hands over her ears and closes her eyes).

Youarenotheryouarenotheryouarenother—

AUGUST

--There's not the slightest need for rudeness, my dear lady.

TRACIE

This has never happened before. What are you? Some kind of projection of subconscious desire? You don't really seem like my type, honey. Too *old*.

AUGUST

A feisty one I see.

TRACIE

If you're gonna intrude on my daydream, then 'least of all you gotta sit somewhere over there.

AUGUST

It may be your fantasy, my dear lady. But it is quite clearly my seat.

TRACIE

Your name on the ticket?

AUGUST

What?

TRACIE

I said, is your name on the ticket?

Hmph. Thought not.

AUGUST

Does it say Belmont on it?

TRACIE

I do believe we're at the Belmont Race track.

AUGUST

Then yes, my name is on the ticket. August Belmont at your service.

TRACIE

Like Mr. Belmont, as in Belmont Stakes? Mr. Belmont as in Belmont Park?

AUGUST

All three. At your disposal. Or more correctly, if I might—at the disposal of my seat, which you continue to occupy. You see, the seat, the whole park, are mine.

TRACIE

Listen, all I'm trying to do is have a little fantasy here. I just lost my job so I do this to relax. My yoga instructor suggested it.

AUGUST

You don't appear to be a Hindu to me. You appear to be a Negro.

TRACIE

What?

AUGUST

(Sotto).

I am, you know, a Hebrew myself. A Rothschild. Just don't let it get out. The Hebrews are not favored in this New Amsterdam. But I've done well for myself. I've got wealth, wit, wealth, good-looks, wealth and, well, wealth. But when I wanted to marry my Caroline I still had to forge my birth certificate—

(An ANNOUNCER is heard, "And they're off!" They stand for a moment, watching).

TRACIE

Oh, Red's looking good!

AUGUST

Fine animals, all.

TRACIE

When you fantasize you pick only the best: Barbaro, Affirmed, and Secretariat.

AUGUST

Really top-notch. Better than we had in my day.

TRACIE

Oh, he's catching up!

AUGUST

He'll trollop him all right!

TRACIE

There he goes!

(They react as the race concludes, etc).

That was a good one.

AUGUST

Yes, they're always over too fast. Would you care to join me for a Belmont Breeze down in the clubhouse?

TRACIE

A drink does sound good.

AUGUST

I myself have never met a Negro Hindu before.

TRACIE

I'm probably a lot of things you haven't seen before.

AUGUST

What brings you to my park?

TRACIE

My career has taken a detour. More like a high-speed collision.

AUGUST

A time to reflect, then, a time to re-access.

TRACIE

What kind of fantasy are you? The point of daydreaming is *not* to reflect. Thinking about it is the last thing I want to do.

AUGUST

When I came to this country from Austria, I had nothing but the shirt on my back and the shoes on my feet, which I made myself. But I worked like a dog. Years on end. Never ceasing work.

TRACIE

Heard that one before.

AUGUST

And I prevailed. But the money did nothing for my outlook. The sky was the same sky it always was.

TRACIE

A sky is a sky is a sky is a sky.

AUGUST

It wasn't until I met my Caroline. At first I wanted nothing to do with her. A distraction from my work. But then, I let myself love. I opened myself to it.

TRACIE

Like a hallmark greeting card.

AUGUST

I saw the clouds part and there was a little opening just big enough for me to fit in. And I took it. I got out.

TRACIE

Maybe I should have a drink.

AUGUST

Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, I think they say. I'll be at the club if you want to join me. Tell them August sent you. If they give you trouble say you're just in from Calcutta.

End Scene

Scene 6

SETTING:

The same day. RABBI ISIDORE's home. ISIDORE is making coffee, but not adeptly—he makes it like someone who has never done it before.

ISIDORE

I must give sound advice.

(Using an automatic coffee maker, puts water into the basin, turns on machine, then meticulously dollops coffee powder into pot, placing it under already dripping water).

SIMCHA

(In awe, then, angry)

Rabbi, I'm not here for advice.

ISIDORE

This is easier than I thought it would be. What were you saying Sam?

SIMCHA

--I only mentioned the fact that Rachel moved out. Of course it's all an act. She won't really leave. And please, don't call me Sam. No one has called me that for 30 years.

ISIDORE

These things I am supposed to remember?

(Yelling off-stage) Juanita?

(to SIMCHA)

Usually Juanita makes my coffee.

(Yelling)

Is this *hutzeputz* now on-the-line?

SIMCHA

Imagine walking out on me like that! And she left no information whatsoever. No telephone number. Nothing.

ISIDORE

She's upset. Not everyone has the hard heart like you. So closed off.

SIMCHA

Do you need help?

ISIDORE

(Angry)

Do I *look* like I need help?

(Beat).

Bad rain out there.

SIMCHA

They say there's power outages up and down Brooklyn. Never mind about Rachel. Remember? I'm here to talk about the unveiling. I want to have it after *shloshim* is over. I know that makes it soon, but it's best to get it over with.

Unveiling? ISIDORE

At the cemetery? SIMCHA

Of course. Wyatt Earp. ISIDORE

Who? SIMCHA

Wyatt Earp is buried in a Jewish cemetery. ISIDORE

What? SIMCHA

Have you heard of this... Maxwell house? ISIDORE

Rabbi...the unveiling? SIMCHA

I like it very much. This is a Jewish coffee. You will have some? The cemetery... Yes. In San Francisco. You see, his wife. Jewish. So when he died-- ISIDORE

--The arrangements are for Rive. SIMCHA

No. Wyatt's wife was no Rive. ISIDORE

Rive was my wife. SIMCHA

Ethyl maybe? ISIDORE

SIMCHA

We were talking about my wife, Rive.

ISIDORE

Coffee or cream?

SIMCHA

And I happened to mention my daughter—coffee AND cream.

ISIDORE

Who?

SIMCHA

Rachel. You did the naming ceremony?

(No recognition from ISIDORE)

Known her for 19 years?

ISIDORE

Your daughter this is?

SIMCHA

Yes. Rachel. She makes these threats. She wants to be an artist in *Manhattan*.

ISIDORE

You can get a wonderful coffee there...in Manhattan. You've been to this Starfake's?

SIMCHA

She said she was leaving but she'll be back.

(beat)

Starbucks.

ISIDORE

Starbucks?

SIMCHA

The coffee shop is called Starbucks.

ISIDORE

You think I don't know this?

SIMCHA

Listen: I have to get to work soon. I need you *coherent* right now. Can you, you know, pull yourself together?

ISIDORE

Pull *myself* together *schmendrick*? I am not the one who needs...clarity. When you came here thirty years ago--

SIMCHA

--This isn't working. Maybe I should do the ceremony with the new Rabbi. Leave you to you enjoy your retirement—

ISIDORE

--No! Simi. Don't go. I...get lonely.

SIMCHA

This is taking too long. The day after tomorrow is *Sukkos*. I have things to do.

ISIDORE

You to me have always been like... a son.

SIMCHA

Thank you.

ISIDORE

And I helped you become a Jew again.

SIMCHA

True.

ISIDORE

When you came back... You were, what, "strung up?"
(*putting copious amounts of sugar in coffee*).

SIMCHA

Strung out. I was strung out. Listen, I came here to talk about an unveiling. Can you, you know, focus?

ISIDORE

You think I'm crazy? I ask you which headstone you are to have. You forget. What is it you are thinking about? Your daughter?

SIMCHA

I'm here for Rive.

ISIDORE

Passing so young. It is a tragedy. *Oy vey. Nisht do gedakht.*
(beat)

The marriage was a happy one?

SIMCHA

What's happiness?

ISIDORE

Happiness...is what you had with your music.

SIMCHA

She was the only one who understood me.

ISIDORE

You think this is true?

SIMCHA

Yes. I mean, we had our problems. It wasn't always easy.

ISIDORE

Nothing worth anything is.

SIMCHA

Rive understood me.

ISIDORE

Were there... relations?

(no response)

With your wife?

SIMCHA

I don't know what you mean.

ISIDORE

Of course you do. *Shtup. Shtup!*

SIMCHA

In the beginning there was more.

ISIDORE

Did you tell her you loved her?

SIMCHA

She knew. I'm not very good at...expressing myself, I guess.

ISIDORE

Were you in love with her?

SIMCHA

I gave her what I could. Not necessarily what she deserved, but what I could.

(Beat).

I don't see what this has to do what the marker will say. Maybe these are things better done with the other Rabbi.

ISIDORE

Don't go!

SIMCHA

Rabbi, how long have I known you?

ISIDORE

You... we grew up together. In Poland. *Oyslendish fraynd*. Someday, I will go back and visit. Go back to the old country. See my father the farmer. The orchards he had—

SIMCHA

--No. You grew up with my father, Saul.

ISIDORE

Saul... A good man, a lovely wife. I remember her quite well. All three were friends. He left before the war with her. And I stayed to help my poor father. Best for everyone...and then...what happened then?... How is Saul?

(looks around for something to stir coffee with—uses his finger).

SIMCHA

He's been dead for 30 years.

ISIDORE

Who would of guessed it?

SIMCHA

You delivered the service.

ISIDORE

Great men... that generation.

(Sitting).

They made you. You and your Ford Explorers. From the *shtetl* they brought you here to crowded tenements and they built you by sewing buttons on shirts. By selling *tshatshkes* on Ludlow. But now they are gone. Just me...I'm here...

SIMCHA

The only thing we can do now is plan for the future.

ISIDORE

(Suddenly alert)

You said no cream? Right. When you were away ...Columbia was it? You were a bright boy.

SIMCHA

Can we not talk about this?

ISIDORE

Your father was so proud. *Zeyer shtolts*. He says "My son is in the Columbia school. And he will be a doctor!" I like mine black.

(pours in large amounts of cream).

SIMCHA

I should really get going—

ISIDORE

--But then you become the musician. And how he waited for you, Sam. To come back. I was with him when he died he said—

SIMCHA

--Look—

ISIDORE

--How he only wanted to see you again before he died--

SIMCHA

--Do you want me to say that I killed my father? I know the story, Rab—

ISIDORE

--But then

(Animated).

God came to you.

SIMCHA

I used to think God would come to me like a revelation. Like a great light, heavy metal music blaring. That kind of thing. It never happened. I wait for—

ISIDORE

--I know, Simi. For him you have tried to live.

SIMCHA

When I was just a little kid, he used to sing me this old song in Yiddish. When I asked him once about it years later he thought I was crazy. What was that tune?

ISIDORE

Maybe he lost the taste for music.

SIMCHA

Mom said he died of a broken heart. Medically it's not possible. If I only could have done what he wanted—

ISIDORE

--Your father's death it took to bring you back.

SIMCHA

I never spoke to him again.

ISIDORE

I know of guilt.

SIMCHA

You've never been anything but good to everyone you ever crossed.

ISIDORE

Better be careful, *bobele*. The same thing could happen to your girl. You want my advice?

SIMCHA

Do I have a choice?

ISIDORE

Try to be easy on her, Simi. Take a little Orthodox out of your Jewish. No offense, eh?

SIMCHA

Nobody else in the neighborhood has these problems with their children.

ISIDORE

They do. I know. I am their *spiritual advisor* if you will. The things I hear from everyone. Wouldn't you like to know?

Yes. SIMCHA

Well you can't. ISIDORE

Oh. SIMCHA

ISIDORE
Is she not your child, Simi? And are you not your father's son?

SIMCHA
They're not the same thing.

ISIDORE
Let her play her artist. Maybe she'll get famous and buy you a nice Lexus.

SIMCHA
I don't think that would work--

ISIDORE
--Now you. You have your health. You have your lovely daughter, that Hashem should bless you for many years...Amen.

(*Beat*).
What do you say?

SIMCHA
Thank you?

ISIDORE
On the holiday.

SIMCHA
Which one?

ISIDORE
The Jewish holiday.

SIMCHA

That doesn't narrow it down.

ISIDORE

Yom Kippur.

SIMCHA

I don't know. The...*Kol Nidre*?

ISIDORE

NO! The *Al Cheit*.

SIMCHA

Right.

ISIDORE

Say it.

SIMCHA

Now?

ISIDORE

Yes.

SIMCHA

Is that...allowed?

ISIDORE

Say it now.

SIMCHA

I don't underst—

ISIDORE

--Now!

SIMCHA

(As SIMCHA recites the 'Al Cheit,' ISIDORE speaks his own lines over the prayer. SIMCHA should speak throughout. The English should take precedence over the Hebrew. All through this sequence, ISIDORE gets louder. SIMCHA, though begrudgingly reciting at first, begins to grow more earnest after ISIDORE's accusation).

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'oness uvratzon.

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'eemootz halev.--

ISIDORE

For the sin which we have committed before thee in hardening of the heart--

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha beevlee da-at.

ISIDORE

For the sin which have committed before thee by despising parents and teachers--

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'veetuee s'fatayim.--

ISIDORE

For the sins in the *shtetl*. For the sins of Wyatt Earp.—

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'geeluee arayot.

ISIDORE

For the sin of playing the rock and roll music--

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha bagaluee uvasater.

ISIDORE

And for the sin of drugs –

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'deeboor peh.

ISIDORE

For the sin of leaving your father, old and ready to die--

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'hona-at reyah.

ISIDORE

And for having him die and never saying you loved him--

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha beevedat z'noot.--

ISIDORE

For the sin of repeating the mistakes of our fathers—

SIMCHA

THAT'S NOT TRUE!

ISIDORE

Simcha! It is true.

(Goes to him and puts SIMCHA's right hand over his heart. Now with each "transgression" SIMCHA hits himself on the chest. With each line, he grows more manic. With each beat, he hits himself harder. ISIDORE gets louder with each of his lines).

SIMCHA

(beat) Yes.

ISIDORE

SAY IT! Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'zeelzul horim umorim.—

SIMCHA

Al cheyt shechatanu lefanecha b'zeelzul horim umorim.—

ISIDORE

For the fear of death--

SIMCHA

For the sin of our —of my father, and for passing it to on.--

ISIDORE

For the sin of not allowing your daughter to go.

SIMCHA

For not letting her go.

ISIDORE

For the sin of never speaking to her again.

SIMCHA

For the sin of never telling her I love her.

ISIDORE

Never telling her that you love her.-

SIMCHA

V'al kulam ehloha s'leechot s'lach lanu. M'chal lanu. Kaper lanu.

ISIDORE

For all these, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us remission. Simcha, the gates are not closed. This is my gift to you.

SIMCHA

(A long silence settles over the scene)

I'm sorry. I have to go. I'll...I'll see you soon, OK?
(He kisses him on the forehead).

End Scene

ACT II

Scene 1

SETTING:

Later that day. A bench, on Bedford Ave., outside of Brooklyn College. TRACIE sits, stage right, eating lunch. Enter ISIDORE, left. He could look slightly lost. He walks up to TRACIE, gets uncomfortably close, and stares at her sandwich.

TRACIE

Can I help you?

ISIDORE

No.
(Does not move).

TRACIE

Are you lost?

ISIDORE

This word...“Lost”... Indeed.
(Profoundly).
Farblonzhet. I came looking for a young man. Have you seen him?

TRACIE

There are a lot of young men around here. It's a school.

ISIDORE

Well. Not so young. But young once. I held him in my arms. But then he was gone.

TRACIE

Nobody by that description. Listen, I'm having a really bad day, so—

ISIDORE

--I seem to have forgotten the way.

TRACIE

The way to what?

ISIDORE

I forgot to tell him something so I came for him.

TRACIE

There's a lot of heartache around here.

ISIDORE

Be careful for the hardening of the heart.

TRACIE

You know how to get yourself home?

(Beat)

Where are you going?

ISIDORE

Where I have been is longer than where I am going.

TRACIE

Where have you been? "*Mister, you been to the zoo?*"

ISIDORE

I have to go home.

TRACIE

Do you get let out on your own?

ISIDORE

I wanted to say to him.... But now I am too tired.

(Beat).

I want to go to the King's Plaza.

TRACIE

You're not going to find much royalty around here.

ISIDORE

When I was very young, I wanted to save the world.

TRACIE

This isn't a bus stop.

ISIDORE

When I was older I wanted to save my congregation.

TRACIE

Probably *used* to be a bus stop.

ISIDORE

Now, I only want to save myself.

TRACIE

Lot of us *used to be*. (*Beat*).

ISIDORE

Why is this?

TRACIE

Why? Why is the sky blue? Why is the sea green? Why don't I have tenure? Why isn't that tree a willow? 'Cause it grows in Brooklyn!
(*Laughs*).

ISIDORE

I don't understand.

TRACIE

It was a joke. A literary joke.

ISIDORE

This is a bus stop? I want to go to the King's Plaza, *Polska*.

TRACIE

Listen, I want to help you. But you've got to start making sense. This is stop-stop. Just a bench. You're on the road to nowhere. This isn't Harvard. This is Brooklyn College.

King's Plaza is all the way down Bedford Avenue. You sit down with me and all you're gonna wait for is an unemployment check.

ISIDORE

And there I can come to Poland?

TRACIE

You live in Greenpoint?

ISIDORE

No. I want to go to King's Plaza.

TRACIE

I just told you. All the way down Bedford.

ISIDORE

This is in Poland. King's Plaza, *Polska*.

TRACIE

You're gonna want to wait at the plane-bench, honey.

ISIDORE

Where is this? This bench is very plain. When I was young, I worked hard to get here to America.

TRACIE

You know where home is?

ISIDORE

Now that I am old, home is where I want to go.

TRACIE

I've heard that once you get back there, there's no there, there.

ISIDORE

(Sits down, then motions to sandwich).

That looks good.

TRACIE

Want some?

ISIDORE

What? I don't touch *treyf*. Are you trying to kill me?

TRACIE

Sorry.

ISIDORE

One time, at a party. I had a little sandwich. Someone said, “Rabbi, there’s shrimp in there.” Do you know what happened?

TRACIE

What?

ISIDORE

Nothing.
(Beat).
 Are you a lesbian?

TRACIE

That was direct.

ISIDORE

I like women too.

TRACIE

Just that. Wasn’t good enough for the tenure committee either.
(Imitating)
 “No one really *does* Queer Studies right now. What we want is to expand our *Trauma* Studies faculty.” Trauma! You want trauma! I’ll show you *trauma*.

ISIDORE

The Torah tells us “No man is to have sexual relations with another man.” But, this is not up to me, this is Hashem’s job.

TRACIE

“God is dead.” Nietzsche said that.

ISIDORE

“Nietzsche is dead.” God said that.

TRACIE

Quick for a senile.

ISIDORE

Senile? What is this word? *Di goyim*? No. I am the Jewish. Do you know Jewish?

TRACIE

No. Senile

(*indicates ISIDORE*).

Gentile

(*indicates self. Beat*).

Listen, honey, even though I'm on the outs I still have a class to teach until winter break. So I best be getting to go teach those college kids...probably YOUR grandkids about queer theory, for as long as it lasts. You sure I can't help you get home? Maybe call somebody?

ISIDORE

In *Polska*, I knew someone like that. He was *fey*.

TRACIE

Even I know what that means.

ISIDORE

The way that we knew this was he and this other boy worked in my father's stable. They had to feed the cows, to milk them. It was many times a day that they had to go to these stables. One time they were taking longer than usual. My father sent me down to see what was the matter.

TRACIE

This is the good part...

ISIDORE

Maybe not so much for me, but for them I suppose.

TRACIE

The hot part.

ISIDORE

No. The stables were cool. It was fall--

TRACIE

--The stables.

ISIDORE

I open the door. And there they are. Wrapped in each others' arms. They are naked. They are very still. And they are asleep.

TRACIE

You didn't wake them.

ISIDORE

This boy was a friend of mine. I didn't want for my father to let him go.

TRACIE

What did you do?

ISIDORE

I quietly closed the door. I then walked a few paces away, and dropped a bucket--loud to wake them. After a few minutes, they came out with the milk and I pretend to be walking down to the stables from the house.

TRACIE

They were milking more than the cows.

ISIDORE

I suppose this is true.

TRACIE

No one ever found out?

ISIDORE

This boy who was my friend moved here to New York with his wife and lived a very normal life. And the other boy, he was killed in the war. My friend never said a thing about it. He opened some *schmate* shop or something like so many of them did. A beautiful wife. We were all great friends before the war.

TRACIE

Normal?

ISIDORE

If God walked into the room. Would you turn to see him?

TRACIE

It's my job to look for the truth. Or *was*.

ISIDORE

I wouldn't. I would run like hell.

TRACIE

Afraid of what you might find out?

ISIDORE

This is what I am wanting to say. If you see Simi tell him this—

TRACIE

--I don't know if anything is normal.

ISIDORE

They say I am a man who has lived without the guilt. But I know what this is- guilt! To lie, for years on end, to who you love the most because of a promise.

TRACIE

I'm sorry I don't know what you're talking—

ISIDORE

Tell Simi this. Saul was that way. And Ruth, his wife, I loved, we protected him. Tell him that through forgiveness we live.

TRACIE

I can't tell him that. I don't even know who he is.

ISIDORE

Then you must do something else.

TRACIE

I don't know if I—

ISIDORE

Take it from me.

TRACIE

I can't promise—

ISIDORE

You must learn to let go. This you can do for me?

TRACIE

(Beat).

This is something else.

ISIDORE

This. You can do for you?

TRACIE

I guess when the clouds part just a little and there's an opening. Then, you gotta take it. You don't get too many moments in the sun.

(*Beat*).

Maybe it's been worth it.

ISIDORE

I am done. Why are we here?

TRACIE

What I do, teaching this. Teaching *tolerance*. 'Seems to me what you do too.

ISIDORE

I teach *Torahrance*. Same difference. When I was a young man I worked very hard to get here to America. Now that I'm here all I want to do is go home. When you're home, *stay there*.

TRACIE

And where is that?

ISIDORE

Home is who you make it with. Oy. I am tired.

TRACIE

When you put down roots somewhere, you need some support. Like that tree still growing in Brooklyn.

ISIDORE

Lady, I got no idea what it is you are talking about.

TRACIE

What time is it?

ISIDORE

Not so into time.

TRACIE

I have to go. I have to... make a new plan.

ISIDORE

(*Beat*).

Oh. Here is the bus to take me home to *Polska*.

TRACIE

I told you. This is not a bus stop!

(A that moment, much to her surprise, a bus pulls up. ISIDORE gets on, waves "bye." Tracie stares in disbelief, then waves back).

End Scene

Scene 2

SETTING:

SIMCHA's house. A few days later. The lights are out.

RACHEL

(SIMCHA enters through the front door).

Hello?

SIMCHA

Noodle! You finally came back.

RACHEL

(lights a match...lights a candle).

The prodigal daughter has returned...

How do I look?

SIMCHA

How would I know?

(Stumbles into living room).

The power is kaput up and down the street.

(Sees match).

You're not smoking are you?

RACHEL

No...Where have you been?

SIMCHA

I had a night shift.

RACHEL

All night?

SIMCHA

I had some other errands. But before that I was looking for you everywhere. I went to your school and looked around. I went to the Lower East Side. I found this...this old bar that I used to go to. I forgot how they always put mirrors in bars. Why do they do that? Does anyone really want to look at themselves while they drink?

RACHEL

You were drinking?

SIMCHA

I was looking.

RACHEL

For me?

(Beat).

Well. I made some cookies and the burner was out. I came back for a few things... and I wanted to talk to you.

SIMCHA

I have something to say to you too.

RACHEL

Well. Should I go first?

SIMCHA

No. No. Listen, Noodle. I want you to know that I've been...thinking about the moving out thing. And, well. Maybe it's OK if you try something different for a while.

(detects odor).

--Is something burning?

RACHEL

The cookies!

SIMCHA

(Takes them out, etc.)

You know, I went away for a while when I was your age, and though it didn't really work out for me, maybe you'll be different and well—

RACHEL

--It's not going to be that easy—

SIMCHA

--They're completely ruined.

RACHEL

Forget the cookies. You need to know something.

SIMCHA

I know: I should have the oven fixed.

RACHEL

Something else.

SIMCHA

Can you help me with this?

RACHEL

I want you to know that I still love all the Jewish *stuff*. Well, not *all* the Jewish stuff. But enough of it. I love it... because I love you. I just don't know if I can have everything I want.

SIMCHA

What do you want?

RACHEL

There's more than one reason why I made friends with those girls on Orchard Street.

SIMCHA

You aren't friends anymore?

RACHEL

They've been able to take me to a certain place--

SIMCHA

--Then you'll move back?—

RACHEL

They're a couple. They know what it's like to come out—

(Suddenly, the stage lights come back on, there is a loud bang)

--to their families--

SIMCHA

--The lights! ... Did you say something?

RACHEL

What is that?

(she motions outside. Outdoors, through the screen door, it is no longer raining water, instead, there is a steady stream of what appear to be lily petals raining from the sky. The etrog tree is alive again).

Is that hail? SIMCHA

It's falling too soft. They look like... RACHEL

Lily petals? SIMCHA

Yeah. RACHEL
(Pause. They stare).
 Your tree looks good.

Miracles happen. SIMCHA

Dad. RACHEL
(Beat).
 I'm in love with... someone at school. Who's not a boy. She's not even Jewish.
(Beat).
 I'm gay.

You— SIMCHA
(SIMCHA collects his jacket. He goes to the door).

--What are you doing? RACHEL

I think I've forgotten something. SIMCHA

Dad! You can't just leave like this. RACHEL

I think I've forgotten to buy a *lulav* for *Succhus*. I have to go out. SIMCHA

Now? RACHEL

Please take your things. SIMCHA

Will you be back soon? RACHEL

Will you still be here? SIMCHA

Yes. RACHEL

Then no, I won't be back. Not until you're gone.
(He exits). SIMCHA

End Scene

Scene 3

SETTING: SPLIT SCENE. The next day. SIMCHA'S house. RACHEL sits at the dining room table, piles of photo albums scattered about her. Also, A HOSPITAL. ISIDORE lay in an obscured hospital bed . (Which is behind a curtain, or turned from the audience, etc.). The lights are dim. A radio emits a low, sad *Klezmer* tune.

ISIDORE
(He wakes. Only his voice is heard).
What? Saul? You're still here?
Yes?
This I was thinking. This. Before it is too late. *Farshtait?*
(With effort he pulls himself out of the bed and into the view of the audience)
I need to go home with you. I wish that you would say something.
(Enter SIMCHA)

SIMCHA

What're you doing? You shouldn't be out of bed—
(He helps him into a chair)

Thank God you're alright. I've been all over looking for you.

ISIDORE

Finally! *Ich darf es ahf kapores.*

SIMCHA

You know I don't speak Yiddish. Here. I brought you the Mets scores.
(He hands him a newspaper).

ISIDORE

A dank aych.

SIMCHA

When they called me my first thought that was that you were—

ISIDORE

---This is what you want, Saul?

SIMCHA

I'm not Saul.

ISIDORE

I have to go back on the promise.

SIMCHA

Wake up, Rabbi? I... I *need* advice, alright? It's about Rachel. She told me something. I don't know if it's true.

ISIDORE

You know the truth.

SIMCHA

I've been going out a lot lately. First looking for her. Then looking for you. I couldn't find either of you, so I decided to look for myself.

ISIDORE

Jews. We wander.

SIMCHA

Let's get you back into bed.

(The door chime is heard. Beat. It is heard again. RACHEL goes to the door, opens it).

Hi? RACHEL

Hi. TRACIE
(Beat).

How did you— RACHEL

--University system's All Seeing Eye. It tells us more than we should know. TRACIE

Oh. RACHEL

So can I come in? TRACIE

Sure. RACHEL
(TRACIE enters).

He's gone. I wouldn't be surprised if he never came back. He's like a clock that for years ran dependably, never had the wrong time. Then one day, he's always an hour off.

I saw you took a leave of absence. TRACIE

I need some time. I'll be back. RACHEL

You think that's a good idea? TRACIE

What do you care? RACHEL

TRACIE

You know it's not like that.

ISIDORE

This is the truth. How we live our lives.

SIMCHA

That's the truth?

ISIDORE

The truth was our secret. Give me permission to say. Show me the way that roots are put down.

SIMCHA

Listen. You're not making any sense. Can you turn that off? What is this? Jewish NPR? Who plays *Klezmer* on the radio?

(Begins fiddling with the radio).

ISIDORE

Leave it, Saul.

SIMCHA

No. Look. It's me, you know, Simcha. Sam?

(He finds a heavy metal tune on the radio and cranks it. He turns the lights on).

ISIDORE

(Seems to awaken).

Sam. This is you?

SIMCHA

It's me.

TRACIE

You were right. That look was that look.

RACHEL

I know.

ISIDORE

Show me it's you. Give me your head. Put it here on my lap.

What? SIMCHA

Yes. ISIDORE

That's a little...awkward. SIMCHA

It's a revelation you want. Put your head here. ISIDORE

What if someone walks in? SIMCHA

Shh. The words make things happen.
(Places his hands on SIMCHA'S head).
Yesimkha Elohim--
(The radio turns back on, playing heavy metal louder still than before. The lights intensify. ISIDORE speaks over the music).
--ke'efrayim ve'khimnasheh.

There's something wrong with the-- SIMCHA
(The music turns off and the lights return to normal).
 --radio. Well. That was strange. You've got to get that thing fixed. Wow. The blessing on your son? You're really out of it? Do they have you on something?

Finally I am in it. *Shoyn tsayt. Emmes?* Your mother I loved. And your father— ISIDORE

--No I'm Sam. SIMCHA

Was my closest friend. I knew about him. She and I did it to protect him. ISIDORE

We're *now*. America. Brooklyn? SIMCHA

ISIDORE

But only your father could take her. He was not one to marry. Though he cared for Ruth. Best for everyone.

SIMCHA

Stay with me.

TRACIE

But it can never be that. I was, and will always be, your teacher. Even if you're not in school.

RACHEL

That's it? You came to say that?

TRACIE

I care about you, maybe too much. But you are my student. And there are rules.

RACHEL

This is supposed to make me feel better?

ISIDORE

I was with her that night, by the river behind the house.

SIMCHA

What—

ISIDORE

--Then she was with child, and Saul took her as his own. To get Ruth out of the country before the war. They left to America. All three. But the child... this was not his.

SIMCHA

What do you mean?

ISIDORE

I could not leave because I felt I needed to stay with my own father. I came soon after and was here.

SIMCHA

My father—

ISIDORE

Ah, my father. What wonderful stables he had!

No. Saul.

SIMCHA

Yes, where he worked. In the stables.

ISIDORE

What you're saying—

SIMCHA

-- We did it to protect him. He asked me to never say. Never to you.

ISIDORE

This isn't right. My father—

SIMCHA

I am him, Sam. You are mine.

ISIDORE

TRACIE

I wanted to see you again. Maybe for the last time. I'm going to take a teaching job at a Prep School in Bergen County. I applied to a few places. I just heard back from them. I reached out to grab a little piece of the sky, to see what I could get. You know. And the pay out there is good. Better than at Brooklyn College. And on the summers, I can work on the book.

RACHEL

Well.

TRACIE

Well. I'm sorry--

RACHEL

I don't want it to end like this. I want—

TRACIE

--You don't always get everything you want.

SIMCHA

I don't believe you.

ISIDORE

(Beat. Then begins to sing Oyfn Pripetchik:)

Zet zhe kinderlekh,

Gedenkt zhe, tayere, vos ir lernt do,

Zogt zhe nokh a mol un take nokh a mol:

"Komets-alef: o!"

SIMCHA

That's the song my father used to sing to me.

ISIDORE

The song I used to sing. To learn your aleph-bet.

SIMCHA

This...is a lot. I don't know what to say—

ISIDORE

--You have said all you need to say. Help me...

SIMCHA

Here, let me—

(He lifts him. A beat as SIMCHA holds him in half a lift, and half an embrace.)

Thank you for telling me...and for always being...a father to me.

(He places ISIDORE back in the bed).

Sleep. *Schluff* now, *schluff*.

(SIMCHA sits. He almost immediately falls asleep from exhaustion. Beat. The lights darken. The radio turns on again by itself, and a low and sweet Klezmer music emanates. The door creaks open by itself).

RACHEL

I wanted to be *free*. And now that I am, I'm scared. It's lonely.

TRACIE

I used to think the best thing to do was to keep on moving.

RACHEL

And now?

TRACIE

I'm not so sure.

RACHEL

Will you come for *Sukkot*?

TRACIE

I...we'll see. I'll try not to miss it, but I can't promise.
(*She exits*).

RACHEL

And I will. Miss you.

End Scene

Scene 4

SETTING:

Morning. 'Izzy's bedside is obstructed, as before. SIMCHA sleeps in a chair beside the bed. *Enter* ROBERT PLANT, he has a ghostlike aura about him. He dresses like a hodge-podge between ISIDORE and ROB. He speaks with a slight English accent.

ROB

'Ello. You look terrible.

SIMCHA

Jesus!

ROB

I thought you weren't into 'em.

SIMCHA

Who the hell are you?

ROB

You don't recognize me? All those days. High on the Misty Mountain Top.

SIMCHA

Hop?

ROB

Whatever.

SIMCHA

You look like you're from the 1970s.

ROB

You look like you're from the 1950s.

SIMCHA

How did you get in?

ROB

You let me in. More precisely, you keep me out.

SIMCHA

You look a lot like my Rabbi. I mean, *him*.

ROB

Handsome devil. Not looking too sharp at the moment though.

SIMCHA

He had a stroke. Am I having a flashback? Who are you?

ROB

You know me.

(Singing)

“autumn moon lights my way.

For now I smell the rain, and with it pain, and it's headed my way.

Sometimes I grow so tired—”

SIMCHA and ROB

“--but I know I've got one thing I got to do...”

SIMCHA

Robert Plant?

ROB

Sam Bergman?

SIMCHA

Are you real?

ROB

I am an incandescent manifestation of your bent up neurotic guilt-ridden energy.
Paranormal light from within.

(Beat).

Am I blowing your mind?

SIMCHA

A ghost?

ROB

Not dead last time I checked.

SIMCHA

Then simply...

ROB

Farblondzhet.

SIMCHA

What?

ROB

What?

SIMCHA

It sounded like you said “lost” in Yiddish.

ROB

Yiddish? ‘That like Elvish?

SIMCHA

Kinda.

ROB

We’re all lost. I know. One too many cheap floozies. You know what I mean

(winks)

On the end of a three day coke binge, you know, sometimes it made me wonder...

SIMCHA

I was praying... that Izzy would get better. He’s always been...

ROB

Like a father to you.

SIMCHA

Yes.

ROB
God didn't answer?

SIMCHA
You came.

ROB
God gets busy, what with the famine and all.

SIMCHA
I wanted to tell him. Even though I haven't always been patient--

ROB
--Sing it.

SIMCHA
I have always loved him as someone who always did the right thing. I wanted to tell him *that*.

ROB
Even now you think he always did the right thing?

SIMCHA
I wish I could have known sooner. I have so much to say.

ROB
He can't hear you anymore.

SIMCHA
How do you know?

ROB
I'm Robert Plant. What don't I know? He's out now. He's gone. Before he went he said to open your heart to forgiveness, and everything will be revealed.

SIMCHA
Open my heart? That kind of talk again...

ROB
For turning away from God.

SIMCHA

That was never a question. Why didn't he tell me I was his son before?

ROB

They protected him.

SIMCHA

Protected him from what?

ROB

Your daughter. She's a queer.

SIMCHA

WHAT THE FUCK DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH SAUL?

ROB

Just a funny thing. How things have a way of circling back. And how other people—people who care, have to help in any way they can.

SIMCHA

Are you implying that—

ROB

--That you have to protect your own daughter? To help her? Sure. Anyways. He wanted you to know. Figured it may help things out now. There's room in his heart for you.

SIMCHA

Meaning...

ROB

Listen. I want to leave you with something.
(pulls an etrog out of his coat).

SIMCHA

What is it?

ROB

A piece of his heart. A yellow, citrus *shtikl*. He wants you to have it. His last wish.
(Hands him the etrog).

SIMCHA

Last wish.

ROB

It's time for his show to go on the road.

(Light over ISIDORE'S bed goes off. "Stairway to Heaven" begins to play very softly in the background).

SIMCHA

What does this mean? What is this for?

ROB

Bullocks, man. You're the doctor.

(Singing)

"You said I was the only, with my lemon in your hand"

(Disappears. Pause.)

SIMCHA

Oh God. I'm sorry.

(Music swells).

End Scene

Scene 5

SETTING:

A little over a week later. A Long Island cemetery. Rive's unveiling. SIMCHA stands alone with a guitar in hand. At lights up he takes over the playing of "Stairway to Heaven."

SIMCHA

(RACHEL appears at the other end of the stage. He plays the last few notes of the same song and begins to give the eulogy. As he does so, he takes rocks out of his pocket and places them around the grave).

Tell people you'll be playing Led Zeppelin at a Jewish funeral and you're sure not to get too many attendees.

(Beat).

I used to sing that to her when we first met. She was really the only one around here who liked that kind of stuff.

(Beat).

Later, when she got sick I started spending a lot of time driving down Bedford Avenue. To the old dive bars and the rockers on Ditmas. I didn't talk to anyone. I would take off my kippah and just sit in the back and listen to the music. Just to feel, for a while like I was back in that world. Like I wouldn't have to leave.

(Enter RACHEL)

RACHEL

No one's here. Not even Uncle Irv.

SIMCHA

I didn't want anyone here, anyway. Except you.

RACHEL

Well, I'm here.

SIMCHA

Did you know that your Mom's dad and mine were business partners?

RACHEL

Of course.

SIMCHA

And that before we were even teenagers we were best friends? And our dads, they made a pact, that we would get married.

RACHEL

God, we're so medieval.

SIMCHA

And when I left for the music, her father was going to make her marry Irv. I couldn't leave her to that. I came back to the fold for dad. But I came back to the family for Rive. It was the last thing I ever wanted was to come back.

(Beat).

These rocks are from Rive's garden. She started working lots in the garden after we decided not to get the place in the Catskills. She liked it there.

(Pause. Lights change. RACHEL approaches SIMCHA).

RACHEL

You abandoned us, there at the end. I just want you to know that.

(She turns to leave).

SIMCHA

Izzy died.

(Beat).

I thought you should know.

RACHEL

I'm...sorry. He was a good person. I know you cared a lot about him.

SIMCHA

Yes.

I never did this because I wanted to hurt you, or disrespect your mother's memory.

RACHEL

You think I had a choice? This is the way I am. You had a choice.

SIMCHA

I did this because there is this empty pit inside of me. I've been sleeping on that damn couch for months. Every morning since she died I'd wake up alone, expecting Rive to still be there, sick but still there, in that little room upstairs. But then I remember that she's gone and it becomes just another day that I try not to think about it.

RACHEL

I didn't know you played so well. I didn't really know...anything. You never tell me anything. If you would just *tell* me things, maybe we wouldn't be in this mess.

(beat).

You know, mom used to sing that song.

SIMCHA

She learned it from me. Have you ever wondered why I call you "Noodle?"

RACHEL

It's just some crazy name.

SIMCHA

When I was your age, the only thing that made me happy was noodling on the guitar.

RACHEL

And now...

SIMCHA

You're the only thing that makes me happy.

RACHEL

I'm sorry, dad. I...need some time.

SIMCHA

You know why I wanted to bless you, noodle?

RACHEL

Not that. Not now.

SIMCHA

The night my dad died I had a dream. I dreamt that I was at his funeral and there were hundreds of old people there. They were old but they also all looked like me. They all had my face. The men and the women. They started to walk, one by one, into the ground. And I realized they were all my family, going on back generation by generation. Hundreds of Jews going back to I don't know when. They were all me. I tried to get them to stop going into the hole but they couldn't hear me.

(Beat. RACHEL exits).

When I woke the first thing I did was go to the pawn shop on Delancey and sold my guitar. The next day I started wearing a *Kippa*. But it's never been enough. It will never be enough.

End Scene

Scene 6

SETTING:

Two days later. The first full day of *Sukkos*. The *Succah*, *stage center left* is two sided, with the open sides facing the audience. The *etrog* tree is nearby. There is a table with food prepared on it. *Stage right and left* are darkened. SIMCHA performs the *Sukkos mitzvah* with *the lulav and no etrog*. This should be done quietly and quickly, and without sentimentality. RACHEL enters, and watches as SIMCHA finishes.

RACHEL

No *etrog*?

SIMCHA

All that work and only one. Left it on Mom's grave this morning. It seemed right.

RACHEL

That's unlike you. Not following the letter.

SIMCHA

Apparently I'm unlike me.

RACHEL

(Indicating etrog tree).

But the tree looks good. It was almost dead before.

SIMCHA

Next year will be a good crop, I think. It's not the miracle that I was asking for, but I'll take it. What are you doing here, Noodle?

RACHEL

I came for my blessing. You said it was time for me to get it.

SIMCHA

I didn't expect you would come. What with everything.

RACHEL

You're the only family I have.

SIMCHA

I'm not asking for you to forgive me.

RACHEL

I'm not offering.

(Beat).

You fucked up, dad.

SIMCHA

So you're not moving back?

RACHEL

No.

RACHEL

I'm here as much for mom as for you. She wouldn't want you to be alone. Speaking of alone, I think I have a friend coming...

SIMCHA

I don't know, Noodle, if I'm ready for you yet. The idea of *you* being what you said you were—

RACHEL

You mean gay?

SIMCHA

Yes. I don't know if I'm ready to see you like that yet.

RACHEL

You're lucky I'm even here! It's time to make a decision: accept me, or lose me.

(A light brightens downstage right, and ISIDORE enters. The area is covered in etrogs).

ISIDORE

Late. They got no buses in heaven. But you must take one to get here. Someone was supposed to pick me up. Doesn't anybody come on time around here? My first thought is this is heaven? It looks like an *esrog* orchard. But then I remember that is was an *esrog* in paradise. To me it looks like home.

(He hears something).

Listen. That's them. The Voices of Those Who've Passed. They're calling me. I should go. I hear I get to spend *Succhus* with George Burns.

(He then strains to hear RACHEL and SIMCHA).

But I can still hear them, the living. Despite the Great Distance. Poor *petzes*. Maybe I have a minute.

SIMCHA

If Izzy were here, he would know what to do.

RACHEL

You've got to do this, Dad. I won't wait.

SIMCHA

Please. Just give me some time.

(Lights down, Sukkah, Lights up, on ISIDORE).

RACHEL

It's too late for that.

ISIDORE

I wonder if they play American baseball here?

(Picks up an etrog and begins to throw it up in the air and catch it. Each time he throws it a bit higher).

I like it very much. Nothing better. I see no baseballs in heaven. But there is fruit.

SIMCHA

I need a sign.

(Finally, IZZY throws it so high that it disappears)

RACHEL

Mom. She knew about me.

I know.

SIMCHA

What?

RACHEL

She told me that's what she thought. Before she died.

SIMCHA

You've known all this time?

RACHEL

I didn't know if it was true. And if it was, I thought you would make the choice to...do the right thing.

RACHEL

You mean like what you've done? Lived your whole life trying to be who you're not?

SIMCHA

What I've done I've done for you.

RACHEL

No. You've done it for a past that you carry around with you, that you lay on everyone around you.

SIMCHA

You don't understand.

RACHEL

I understand. You're an intolerant, stubborn man who can't accept things the way they are. She *told me* to be happy after she was gone. That's what I'm trying to do.

SIMCHA

I don't know if this is going to work. Only heaven knows if—
(The etrog falls directly out of the sky and lands at SIMCHA's feet. SIMCHA, in awe, picks it up).

RACHEL

What was that?

SIMCHA

It's an *etrog*.

You said there was only one. RACHEL

It's... perfect. SIMCHA

Do things fall *up* here? ISIDORE

Do you forgive me? SIMCHA

No. RACHEL

Then I have to begin by forgiving myself. SIMCHA

Where did it come from? Did it just fall out of the sky? RACHEL

Do you believe in miracles? SIMCHA

I... don't know. RACHEL

Believe. SIMCHA

The voices. They're calling me to come.
(ISIDORE *exits*) ISIDORE

Thank you. SIMCHA

Dad, are you OK? RACHEL

I'm ... good enough to know that I want to try to make it work. Begrudgingly, of course. SIMCHA

It's a start. RACHEL

Hello? TRACIE

Who are you? SIMCHA

I'm with her. TRACIE

With her? SIMCHA

Jesus, dad-I wanted the two people I admire most to sit down for dinner. Tracie, Simcha. RACHEL

Am I interrupting anything? TRACIE

We were— RACHEL

I was just about to give my daughter the blessing on children. SIMCHA

I'm not interrupting? TRACIE

I have one word for you: *ushpizin*. RACHEL

Ushwho? TRACIE

Please come in. SIMCHA

You have to have guests over for *Sukkos*. It's the law. RACHEL

SIMCHA

Welcome.

RACHEL

If you don't, the Jewish police will arrest you and make you eat dinner at *Red Lobster*.

SIMCHA

Gut Yontev.

TRACIE

Holla.

SIMCHA

Yes. Challah we have, but not yet. We have to give the blessing first. And it will be to my daughter. On her 20th year. Would you like some wine?

(Goes to get wine).

RACHEL

I wanted to apologize for the—

TRACIE

--It's hard what you're doing. Just seeing if I can help- as a friend. Let's leave it at that.

(Beat)

Did I tell you that Harvard finally called?

RACHEL

That's great. What did they say?

TRACIE

They asked if I could double my annual donation. No, there won't be anymore of that- for awhile at least. And I'm not going to Bergen County either. I decided to stay closer to home. I applied for a job teaching at a Friends high school in Flatbush.

RACHEL

Really? That's great.

TRACIE

Real, applied social change. I tell you, Rac—I mean, Lily.

RACHEL

Just Rachel is fine.

SIMCHA

A toast?

TRACIE

To here.

SIMCHA

And there.

Lights. End of Play.