

Madeleines

By Bess Welden

Spanish translation by Christina Ruiz de Luque

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For three women. All characters are of Eastern European Jewish descent.

Actor #1:

DEBRA MORITZ – late 40s - early 50s; a struggling then successful food writer, sardonic sense of humor, a recovered alcoholic with an edge but deeply nurturing and warm.

Actor #2:

JENNIFER MORITZ – early to mid-50s, Debra's older sister; highly accomplished medical school professor; a buttoned-up perfectionist; a mother whose own family is falling apart.

Actor #3:

ROSE MORITZ – 70s, Debra and Jennifer's mother; an exacting cookie baker and small businesswoman, stubborn, opinionated, strong. She doesn't speak with any sort of accent.

LILIA KAMINSKY - 70s, a vivacious Argentinian poet, colorful and robustly healthy. Speaks English with an Argentinian accent. Speaks Spanish and Yiddish (minimal verbal language skills required).

Pronunciation note: "ch" in the words "rugelach" "kichel" "Pesach" is pronounced like a hard guttural clearing of the throat

*Text note: // means the next line should interrupt; **bold** means speak simultaneously*

Music note: Producers are responsible for obtaining any necessary rights to include the snippets of songs suggested in the play.

There's a decent-sized empty frame (empty so the audience can see through it) that hangs first in Rose's kitchen and later in Jennifer's apartment. It's the Estée Lauder mirror.

SCENE 1

We are in a kitchen in a small city in the Northeastern Ohio rust belt. It looks exactly as it did in the early 1980s although it's now Spring sometime in the 2010s. We smell baking cookies.

It's late at night. On the kitchen island, there is a large index card box full of hand-written recipes. Nearby an old portable record player and a crate of records. Cole Porter's Anything Goes album is playing almost imperceptibly. ROSE is wearing her apron, mixing cookie batter. DEBRA stands next to her, chopping nuts and putting them in a small bowl.

DEBRA

I chopped the nuts. They're here for you, okay?

ROSE

Did you toast them first?

DEBRA

Yes. Smell.

ROSE sniffs, satisfied.

ROSE

Mmmm. Good. One cup?

DEBRA

Yep. And I kept 18 whole pecans to garnish the tops. See, I'm really learning.

ROSE

I suppose you are.

DEBRA

Mom, are you sure you don't want to use the stand mixer? It'll be so much faster.

ROSE

For Pecan Drops?

DEBRA

It's late. I can see you're tired.

ROSE

Absolutely not. They'll come out flat as your Zayde's *tuchas*.

DEBRA

(laughing) Mom!

ROSE

What? He had a terribly flat rear end. Why do you think he wore, uch, what do you call them...

DEBRA

I'm not sure what you mean.

ROSE

You know the straps... the...

DEBRA

Suspenders?

ROSE

Yes. That's it. Suspenders.

DEBRA

Oh yeah. I do remember. He always wore them.

ROSE

Sometimes with pajamas.

DEBRA

(laughing) Now you're just being silly.

ROSE

It's true. And no one has ever accused me of being silly.

DEBRA

I'm sure you're right.

ROSE

Now enough with this nonsense. You're distracting me.

DEBRA

Mom, it'll be so much easier with the stand // mixer...

ROSE

Out, out, // out!

DEBRA

Okay, okay!

DEBRA retreats to sit on the floor in front of the island with a blanket over her shoulders, listening, making notes in a notebook.

Sound. As ROSE continues mixing the batter by hand she slowly enters into her memory and starts conversing with a large wooden spoon, which she imagines is her father. She voices the spoon as PAPA with a few signs of an Eastern European or Yiddish accent but ROSE never speaks with an accent herself.

PAPA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-mp5EfM4pc> (start at 1:40)

*Bei mir bistu sheyn,
Bei mir hostu kheyn,
Bei mir bistu eyner af der velt¹*

ROSE

You sound good tonight, Papa. Even after a long week.

PAPA

Let's make the supplies list. What do you need, Roseleh?

ROSE

Sugar, ground cinnamon, walnuts, and fresh raspberries, please.

PAPA

Oy, so expensive.

ROSE

For linzer tortes.

¹ *Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn* lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, music by Shalom Secunda, 1934. Producers are responsible for obtaining any necessary permissions to play a recording of or for performance of this song.

PAPA

This we shouldn't have. A Jewish deli with Austrian cookies?

ROSE

Papa, please, let me try. All my other "experiments" have sold out. And not just the new *hamantaschen* flavors, but the chocolate meringues, and the Mexican wedding cookies, and the pistachio biscotti.

PAPA

Biscotti is just Italian *mandelbrot*.

ROSE

Yes! And everyone loved it.

PAPA

The *goyishe* neighbors are talking about you.

ROSE

So what? You worry too much, Papa. Who cares if they think I'm stealing Abruzzi's customers. What matters is that people are asking us for special orders. For weddings and even Christmas parties.

PAPA

Alright, alright. I'll buy the raspberries.

ROSE

Thank you, Papa.

PAPA

It's music time. Turn it up loud.

ROSE lifts the needle on the record player and finds the right groove for "You're The Top." She sings along in her father's accent, dancing with the spoon.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6oGytt0Hiw> (start at 0:33)

PAPA

You're the top! You're the Colosseum,
You're the top! You're the Louvre Museum ²

² Lyrics reprinted with permission of the Cole Porter Trust. Producers are responsible for obtaining any necessary permissions to play a recording of or for performance of this song.

Laughing, she lowers the volume on the record which eventually fades out completely.

PAPA (cont)

Cole Porter is a genius. Not a Jew, like that Irving Berlin or the Gershwins but still.

ROSE

I know, Papa. He's not just a songwriter, he's a poet.

Can you sweep up for me tonight? I gotta finish my homework while this last batch of Pecan Drops are in the oven. My new poem is due tomorrow.

PAPA

Why waste your time on that? What does a grown-up girl with a skill need from this poetry?

ROSE

I like it, Papa. I like shaping the words. Moving my feelings through my hand and onto the page.

PAPA

This, I don't understand. You put your hands in the dough. You shape something people can eat. People like us need to be practical. We all can't be Cole Porter.

ROSE

I know, // but...

PAPA

I am serious, Roseleh. You're good at baking. Very good. You should concentrate on that. We need to build your future.

ROSE

You think I should leave school?

PAPA

You said yourself, you are succeeding here.

ROSE

You're probably right, Papa.

PAPA

Mein gute meyd! You see? You already have what you need. Flour, butter, sugar. An apron and a living. Nobody like us needs more than that. We started all over – a second life.

ROSE

I don't remember the first.

PAPA

And just as well. You were born a second time when we stepped off that boat. That's all you need to know.

ROSE pauses to taste the batter and spits it out.

ROSE

Uch! Oy, God. I put salt not sugar. Stupid, stupid, stupid, STUPID, STUPID! // STUPID! STUPID! STUPID!

ROSE quickly spirals into a complete meltdown. DEBRA does whatever she needs to try to calm her mother.

DEBRA

Mom, it's okay. It's okay. Stop. Please.

A beat for struggle and then settling.

ROSE

Oh Papa, I'm sorry I wasted... I'm // sorry ...

DEBRA pretends to be PAPA.

DEBRA (as PAPA)

It's okay, Roseleh.

ROSE

It's ruined. I need to start // over.

DEBRA (as PAPA)

Don't worry. I'll take care of it.

DEBRA gently takes the spoon out of ROSE's hand.

ROSE

Debra?

DEBRA

Hi, Mom.

ROSE

Were you listening?

DEBRA

Yes.

ROSE

I'm so tired.

DEBRA

I know. Let's get you to bed.

ROSE

No, I need to start over.

DEBRA

Shh, Mom. Let's go. I'll make a new batch. I promise I'll mix them by hand.

DEBRA takes the blanket off her own shoulders and places it over her mother's. She leads her out of the room.

SCENE 2

Evening three weeks later. DEBRA is at the kitchen island. She takes a prescription medicine bottle from her pocket and places it on the counter next to the equipment for making madeleines - a scalloped shell pan, a double boiler, etc. She looks at notes in her notebook and dictates into a recording device. Maybe a smartphone, or even better, an old cassette recorder.

DEBRA

Chapter one ideas. Or maybe a prologue? or introduction?

DEBRA (cont)

When she goes, I'll want to sing the memory of my mother, but I am no singer. I'll want to sing in praise of all she was and all she wasn't. I'll want to sing or even cry, but I am no singer and even now, with so much already lost, the tears don't come.

It's been a long dry spell here. Not just my eyes unable to gather the salt water and rain my grief out; it's been dry, barren, unmoving, this life of mine for much longer than this long slow season of her dying.

I've been here sixteen months and six days.

Come back to my ancestral home,

a semi-circular driveway and a yard

a garage door that wheezes on its un-oiled chain

a gremlin in the sewer grate that heaves and gurgles after a storm

my twin bed in the room with green shag carpet and rainbow wallpaper

and my mother's kitchen

sealed in a time capsule zip-lock

with its side by side Frigidaire that matches the formica counters

and top and bottom built-in ovens.

And yes, the record player taking its honored place near where a television once was when we watched the 5:30 news on WKBN channel 27

during meatloaf and baked potato dinners which my mother always said was my father's favorite, though I don't remember.

We buried him before I knew who he was.

I came back to take care of my mother not because I loved her, but because I couldn't do anything else. The brittle dryness, softened by no amount of drinking, made writing impossible. I had nothing. No one to leave, so I came.

She replays the last paragraph from the device but only gets a few seconds in before we hear ROSE calling from offstage.

ROSE (off)

(panicked) Help me! Debra? Help me!

DEBRA

Okay, // mom.

ROSE (off)

Debra?!? Where are // you?!

DEBRA

I'm coming.

ROSE (off)

Debra?! // Help me!

DEBRA

Mom, it's okay. I'm on my way.

DEBRA grabs the medicine bottle and exits.

SCENE 3

Two days later. JENNIFER is at the kitchen island. It is early evening. She's wearing a dark skirt and a blouse with a ripped piece of black fabric pinned to it, her suit jacket and heels tossed aside. She's listening to "Hot House Rose" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lolEAyaZJjw> (start at 0:12)) on the portable record player. She occasionally sips a glass of white wine as she looks through the recipe box. DEBRA enters with a blanket over her shoulders, sleepy. She sees JENNIFER's "reflection" in the mirror and screams. Startled, JENNIFER wheels around and screams back. They laugh.

DEBRA

Holy shit. I thought you were mom.

JENNIFER

My worst nightmare.

DEBRA

What? Seeing mom's ghost?

JENNIFER

No, being her.

DEBRA

She wasn't entirely as monstrous as we like to pretend.

JENNIFER

If you say so. But if not entirely then I'd say a good 93%. Oh, but that's only an A- so maybe more like 96. Funny to hear you defending her.

DEBRA

I know. How long was I asleep?

JENNIFER

Couple hours. I figured you needed it.

DEBRA opens a can of seltzer and hums along to the song.

JENNIFER (cont)

I don't remember this song.

DEBRA

I didn't either, but Mom told me Dad bought her the album when they were dating. We listened to it a lot this year.

JENNIFER

I like it.

DEBRA

She did, too. I think she saw herself as far superior to poor Hot House Rose Rosenbaum.

JENNIFER

Always thought she was a notch above everyone else.

DEBRA

True.

JENNIFER

And yet every single day she'd kindly remind us that her whole life was about working long hours to support us.

DEBRA

She must have been exhausted all the time.

JENNIFER opens the fridge, pours herself another glass of wine, finishing the bottle. Debra takes the empty bottle.

DEBRA (cont)

Where did this come from?

JENNIFER

Myra Feldman brought it when she dropped off the cold cuts. Want a sandwich? There's tons left over.

DEBRA

No, thanks. Not yet.

JENNIFER

What're we going to do with all this food?

DEBRA

People will come again tomorrow.

JENNIFER turns off the record.

JENNIFER

My flight's at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning. I have to meet with a prospective student at noon and then a lecture at two.

DEBRA

You're not staying for the rest of *shiva*?

JENNIFER

I can't. And Jeremy's supposed to be back from San Francisco. He's traveling so much, I hardly know when he'll be around these days. He really wanted to be here but there was just no way he could // make it in time...

DEBRA

I know. You // said ...

JENNIFER

And Ruth is plowed under with her classes, so I told her she needed to stay put and stay // focused.

DEBRA

You said.

JENNIFER

If I leave at four for the airport // will that...?

DEBRA

Should be fine.

JENNIFER

I'll try not to wake you.

DEBRA

Thanks.

JENNIFER

I can try to come back to go through things, but I'm not sure what's really going on with Ruth. She says she's coming home for the summer to work, but I don't think she's applied for any jobs so... She doesn't tell me too much anymore. Feel free to start without me. I don't think I want anything. Except maybe the Estée Lauder mirror.

DEBRA

The what?

JENNIFER

You know, that mirror. The one she always looked in to check her lipstick before she went out.

DEBRA

She did that all the way to the end. Even just for the grocery store.

JENNIFER

Always Estée Lauder, because "she's a genius Jewish business woman."

DEBRA

And always the same color #320 Defiant Coral.
Why do you want it? The mirror.

JENNIFER

I don't know. There's something I always liked about seeing her face framed like that. Stretching her lips into that silly shape and then blotting them with a (*she makes a "pop" sound with her lips*). It softened her somehow. She didn't look so unforgiving when she didn't know you were watching.

DEBRA

I can ship it to you.

JENNIFER

Thanks. No rush.

DEBRA

And I'll include the three remaining unopened tubes of #320, no extra charge, though I'm not sure it's your shade.

JENNIFER

What if I actually started wearing lipstick?

DEBRA (as ROSE)

Would it kill you?

JENNIFER & DEBRA (as ROSE)

To try to look nice?

DEBRA

You sure you don't want anything else?

JENNIFER

I'll take a few photos if that's cool.

DEBRA

Sure.

JENNIFER

Have you seen any immigration papers for her or Zayde?

DEBRA

I don't think so, but I can look.

JENNIFER

If you find anything, send me that, too.

DEBRA

Okay.

JENNIFER

I wish I'd pressed her for more family history.

DEBRA

She never wanted to talk about it.

JENNIFER

Her answer was always: "I don't dwell on // **the past...**

DEBRA

...the past. I'm a forward thinking person." Yeah. I know.

JENNIFER

Jeremy got me one of those 23 and Me tests for my birthday last year. I'd been saying I wanted to see if I could fill in some blanks.

DEBRA

What did it say?

JENNIFER

Exactly what you'd think. 98.8% Ashkenazi Jew.

DEBRA

No exotic revelations?

JENNIFER

Not unless you consider 1% Northern European exotic?

DEBRA

That might explain my love of smoked fish.

JENNIFER

You don't think that's a direct result of growing up in our grandfather's Jewish deli?

DEBRA

Good point.

JENNIFER

Oh, by the way, I talked to Rhoda Kessler after the service about listing the house.

DEBRA

We buried her this morning.

JENNIFER

I don't know how you did it for a whole year.

DEBRA

Sixteen months.

JENNIFER

I'd've been out of my mind in two days. Just being in this kitchen makes me feel like I'm sixteen again or six.

DEBRA

Exactly sixteen months and six days.

JENNIFER

But who's counting?

DEBRA

I am.

JENNIFER

Look, Deb. I'm sorry you had to do all this. She probably would have been better off if we'd gotten her in somewhere, but I certainly didn't want to fight that one.

DEBRA

We were fine. It was hard at the beginning and then toward the end, like when she started talking to spoons, but we figured it out.

JENNIFER

Never thought I'd hear you say that.

DEBRA

It was a year of surprises.

JENNIFER

Sixteen months.

DEBRA

Correct. 65 Shabbats, four Passover seders, a trip to the emergency room, two Rosh Hashana dinners, one Yom Kippur break-the-fast, a week at St. Elizabeth's, and all the while baking for one Hannukah party, five bar mitzvahs, seven bat // mitzvahs...

JENNIFER

She never // stopped.

DEBRA

...nine weddings, even a couple baby namings. The basement freezer's full. She was trying to finish for the Sniderman wedding next week. Can you believe little Jill Sniderman is getting married?

JENNIFER

Who would've ever thought you'd be back here to even know that?

Beat.

DEBRA

I don't think the house is worth much. It took the Coppermans almost three years to sell theirs.

JENNIFER

Three years?

DEBRA

And that wasn't even as long as they thought it might be. You know who bought it?

JENNIFER

Who?

DEBRA

Mike Shapiro.

JENNIFER

Mikey Shapiro moved back? What happened?

DEBRA

Divorce. Decided to take over Steel City Milling from his dad.

JENNIFER

Have you seen him?

DEBRA

Yeah. Mom still gets most of her bulk supplies from them. One day he showed up with the delivery.

JENNIFER

And she let him into the house?

DEBRA

She never knew it was him.

JENNIFER

You never told her?

DEBRA

No.

JENNIFER

She must have asked.

DEBRA

Yeah.

JENNIFER

Were you in touch with him after you left?

DEBRA

No. But, you know, Facebook. He's asked me out a couple times.

JENNIFER

And...?

DEBRA

Haven't had much time for a social life, you know. But I invited him here for dinner.

JENNIFER

And...?

DEBRA

Everything'll be different now with mom gone, so... who knows?

JENNIFER

But you like him?

DEBRA

I always did.

Beat. JENNIFER goes back to looking through the recipe box.

DEBRA (cont)

What're you looking for?

JENNIFER

The madeleines recipe.

DEBRA

You want to make them?

JENNIFER

I wouldn't even dare try. You know I "don't excel in the kitchen."

DEBRA

Mom said that?

JENNIFER

I think it was her attempt at being nice in telling me I was a total failure in her domain. Not that she ever tried to teach me.

DEBRA

Why madeleines?

JENNIFER

This was the first year I didn't get any. She always sent a package. Growing up I thought they were specifically for Pesach, 'til I got to French Lit and discovered that Proust wasn't even Jewish.

DEBRA

Did she ever tell you why she made them every spring?

JENNIFER

No. But for the holiday, right?

Short pause.

DEBRA

This box is full of stories.

Last summer when she burned an oven full of snickerdoodles and the fire department had to come, I started to hang out in here while she baked, just to keep an eye on things. She started showing me the cards and telling me what she remembered about each of the recipes. And honestly Jen, I started to resent you even more than I did before.

JENNIFER

I know things haven't been easy for you, // but...

DEBRA

Every damn recipe in this box, aside from the ones for holidays, is about you. You were the first, the golden goody daughter who could do no wrong. There's a cookie recipe for every milestone event of your perfect life – First Steps Cookies, First Day of School Cookies, Riding a Two-wheeler, Winning the Spelling Bee etc. etc. Amazingly there isn't a Wiped Her Own Ass Hazelnut Wafer.

JENNIFER

Oh, Deb, come on.

DEBRA

She never asked me what I liked. It was all taken care of already. It never occurred to her that the last thing I'd eat on the day I got my license and could have driven away and never come back was a goddamn orange icebox cookie.

JENNIFER

I don't like them either. She chose them as a punishment because I'd disappointed her.

Sound. Lights change. ROSE enters. She remains throughout the scene but is only seen and heard by her daughters during the flashback-memory moments. She holds a baking sheet of cookies.

ROSE

I have chocolate chip almond coming out of the oven right now. I'll never have to drive either of you to another lesson or practice again. Hallelujah!

JENNIFER

I have to go back next week.

ROSE

Why? It wasn't the wrong day, was it?

JENNIFER

No.

ROSE

How could you have made such a // mistake?

JENNIFER

No, mom. I just didn't pass, so I have to go // back.

ROSE

You didn't pass? An A+ in chemistry but you flunk the driving test?

JENNIFER

Yeah.

ROSE moves a garbage can to the center of the room and slowly slides all the cookies off the tray into the can.

Lights change.

JENNIFER (cont)

I'm sure you don't remember but she didn't talk to me for the next week until I got home and she saw the temporary paper license. She pulled a roll of dough out of the freezer, sliced the circles and baked them off.

DEBRA

Orange Icebox License Cookies.

JENNIFER

I know you think I had it better. Somehow I always knew I needed to get it all right, everything, every time if I wanted her to love me. At least she never expected that from you.

DEBRA

First period cookies, junior prom cookies, college acceptance cookies. Strangely there are no fell-off-your-bike-and-broke-your-collarbone cookies, no got-in-a-car-accident cookies, no came-home-drunk cookies, no abortion cookies.

Sound. Lights change.

ROSE

I'm just finishing this batch of *rugelach*, you know how difficult the rolling out can be. What is it?

DEBRA

I need to tell you something.

ROSE

I have three minutes before the timer. What?

DEBRA

I think I'm pregnant.

ROSE

You're not sure?

DEBRA

I mean, yes. I'm pregnant.

ROSE

Who?

DEBRA

It doesn't matter. I don't want it.

Pause.

ROSE

I can't take you. You'll have to call your sister to come home.

Lights change.

DEBRA

The *rugelach* were for Daniel Kirchner's *bris*.

JENNIFER

How do you remember that?

DEBRA

I didn't until I saw the recipe card. She wrote down every time she made each one. Some of the lists go on to five or six cards stapled together. There're thank you notes and old invitations stuffed in between. It's her whole life in there. A love note from Dad. First time he came into the deli, she sold him a half-dozen black and white cookies. He came back the next day to buy peanut butter thumbprints and gave her a bunch of roses.

JENNIFER

Then it's a wonder she ever went out with him. She hated roses. She was allergic.

DEBRA

That's what she said. But I have a theory. I don't think they made her eyes itchy. I think they made her nostalgic. I think they made her cry.

JENNIFER

She never cried. Crying was banned in this house. "You've got nothing to cry about, believe me. No one's luckier than you. Get over it."

She flips through the recipe cards.

JENNIFER (cont)

Have you read every one of these?

DEBRA

Yep. And I've baked more than half.

JENNIFER

She actually let you?

DEBRA

I'd measure out the flour and it would just be there ready to go. I'd line the pans with parchment paper. We listened to the records. She could still sing every word. We didn't talk about it. She just started ordering me around like I'd been there all along.

JENNIFER

She never let me anywhere near her when she worked at home.
"This is a licensed kitchen..."

JENNIFER & DEBRA (in ROSE's voice)

"Get your *shmutzy* hands out. I'm running a business here, not a kindergarten."

They laugh.

DEBRA

It's cliché as hell, but I had the best time I ever had with her since I came back. I found out who she was by standing here with her, sifting and rolling and being precise because every detail matters. A couple weeks ago, she was up late doing Pecan Drops, and she started "talking" to Zayde and singing. She got totally lost in her memory of explaining to him why she liked writing poems. Who knew?

JENNIFER

Oh yeah. Her high school English teacher thought she had the makings of a poet.

DEBRA

When did she tell you that?

JENNIFER

I was home for spring break my junior year and I had to do a family oral history project. Of course, she didn't want to answer any of the questions.

Sound. Lights change. ROSE fills boxes with cookies for delivery.

JENNIFER (cont)

It's supposed to be a member of my immediate family, Mom, and you are it. Don't you want me to do well in this class? The project's worth half my grade.

ROSE

Why did you wait until the day before you have to go // back?

JENNIFER

Mom.

ROSE

You know I don't remember anything. I was too young when it all happened.

JENNIFER

You remember your father.

ROSE

I don't have time right now.

JENNIFER

Just one question? I'll pick an easy one. Okay?

She quickly flips through a notebook to the end of a long list.

JENNIFER (cont)

What is your proudest accomplishment?

Beat.

ROSE

I won a poetry contest. At school. Eleventh grade before I left. I recited mine for the class and Mr. King told everyone that I could "turn a phrase." I didn't know the idiom. I had to look it up. All that semester he told me I could be a real writer. An immigrant girl like me already with a set of tragedies, writing in her new language of liberation. Complete nonsense, but still. It's the only thing I ever won.

JENNIFER

Do you remember the poem?

ROSE

You said only one question.

JENNIFER

Come on, Mom. Do you?

ROSE pulls out a tattered, folded paper from her recipe box.

JENNIFER (cont)

Is that it?

ROSE

Everything's in here.

JENNIFER

Will you read it?

ROSE

No.

JENNIFER

Please?

Beat.

ROSE

Late nights in the kitchen
Sometimes my father dozes
And breathes my mother's name.
But the sounds
The syllables
Do not conjure her face.
Instead
I must go to the photo
The one
I keep in the box
Between two cards
In her handwriting
The curves and lines of
A language I no longer understand.
Recipes for sweet things.
I do not know if
She preferred tea to coffee
Lemon to milk
We do not speak of her
Because we are
Unable
I cannot hear her voice
And I've stopped wondering

What she might say
I think I will not be
A mother
That way I will never have
To do the leaving
No one will have to remember me
Or forget.

Pause.

JENNIFER

Do you still have the photo?

ROSE

Enough.

ROSE carefully refolds the poem and puts it in her apron pocket.

Lights change.

DEBRA

Did you take the poem?

JENNIFER

No. I memorized it. Recited it to the class. Got an A. It's probably still in there.

DEBRA

(looking through the recipe box) I've been through this box a hundred times already and I'm sure I would have seen it. I wonder where she put it.

Turns out, it wasn't her fault she was the way she was. I've just started to believe that.

JENNIFER

I don't mean this to come out the wrong way, but you seem better. Like better than you've been for a while.

DEBRA

Yeah, well...

JENNIFER

Why don't you come stay with us for a couple weeks? Ruth's room is free 'til she gets back. If she comes back.

DEBRA

You must be feeling guiltier than I thought.

JENNIFER

Gimme a break. I'm just trying to // be...

DEBRA

I'm going to stay.

JENNIFER

Here?

DEBRA

Yeah.

JENNIFER

Why? There's nothing // here.

DEBRA

Are you kidding? They're just about to open a new DoubleTree hotel downtown. The eggplant parm at Alberini's is now better than Scarsella's. Giant Eagle carries two kinds of goat cheese and kombucha. And, Mike's here, so...

JENNIFER

I can't believe you'd even consider // staying.

DEBRA

We've always thought we were too good for this place.

JENNIFER

How could we not? We grew up knowing there wasn't anything here for us. We were raised on the expectation that we'd leave. I never questioned it. Neither did you.

DEBRA

Of course. But fulfilling mom's Jewish American Gospel of Educational Exceptionalism and Economic Achievement didn't work out for me, did it?

JENNIFER

No, I guess not.

DEBRA

I'm not better than this town or any of the people here. In fact, they make all those years I spent in New York seem utterly ridiculous - chasing assignments so I wouldn't miss some chance to get my name in a magazine mom could show off to her friends. I'm perimenopausal and still paying off my grad school loans. People here are dealing with

DEBRA (cont)

the real shit of life - just trying to keep a job and not get too sick and hope their kids stay in school.

JENNIFER

Debra, half the kids we went to school with are dead or in rehab. It's even more depressed and depressing than when we left.

DEBRA

But it's cheap and there are very few distractions. Good for writing. And we have extremely well-attended 12-step meetings of all kinds. I bring a couple dozen whoopie pies to Thursdays at 7:00 at the JCC and we get a capacity crowd.

JENNIFER

I'm glad you can joke about it, but seriously now that mom's // gone...

DEBRA

I'm taking over her business. She said I should. The house is paid for and it seems like people still want cookies so when I clear enough cash I'll buy you out. I haven't had a drink in 63 weeks this Wednesday and I started a draft of a book proposal.

JENNIFER

When were you going to tell me all this?

DEBRA

I don't know. I guess I thought it wouldn't matter much // to you.

JENNIFER

Then what would matter to me? It's just you and me now.

Pause.

DEBRA

I know why mom made madeleines every spring. It actually wasn't for Passover but it's the only time of year she did them. Always on April 10th. So last year, she told me to pull the recipe for her. And tucked behind the card there was this thin piece of pink paper, with deep creases like it had been folded and unfolded a lot. Two tiny faded footprints. Baby girl Moritz, 10 April 1964.

JENNIFER

What?

Sound. Lights change.

ROSE

Technically, they're not cookies. They're French tea cakes. Get the scalloped shell pan. Preheat the oven to 450. Butter, two eggs, sugar, matzah meal cake flour. Do you want lemon or vanilla?

DEBRA

Lemon.

ROSE

There should be one in the fridge. Get a small saucepan for the butter. 3/4 cup. Never skimp on the butter. It's all about the butter. Melt it on medium low.

DEBRA

Mom, what happened to the baby?

ROSE

Which baby?

Start a double-boiler. You know how? Watch the butter and as soon as it melts take it off the fire to cool. Crack the eggs into a separate bowl, always a separate bowl to // make sure...

DEBRA

there's no blood or shell. I know.

ROSE

Add one cup sugar and heat it over the water just until lukewarm.

DEBRA

Your baby. The first one.

ROSE

How do // you...?

DEBRA

Is she why you make these every year?

ROSE

Stir it constantly. Don't look at me, look at what you're doing. It's warm enough. Take it off the heat and keep beating until it's thick but light and creamy. You need to get as much air into it as possible. Keep going. I'll tell you when to stop.

DEBRA

On her birthday?

ROSE

Whose birthday?

DEBRA

The baby. The first one.

ROSE

She was too little.

Let it cool now. When we add the lemon the batter will turn yellow, like her hair.

DEBRA

Your baby was blonde?

ROSE

Yes. She looked just like the little girl I met on the boat when Zayde brought me here. Right after the war. A French girl. On that big boat. I was four years old, and she was just learning how to walk. She was so small I thought she was a doll. Zayde kept promising me a doll when we got to America. She had yellow hair. She wore a sailor coat, navy blue with white trim. It was the cleanest thing I'd ever seen. And her cheeks were pink like those hand-colored photos.

It still needs to cool. It has to be completely cool before you sift in the matzah meal cake flour. One cup.

DEBRA

What else do you remember about the girl on the boat?

ROSE

My little French doll. She let me pick her up. A friend for a few days. Madeleine. That was her name. Then her cheeks got too red and I wasn't allowed to play with her anymore. A few days later I saw her mama holding her, stiff and cold and gray. They

ROSE (cont)

wrapped her in a white cloth, I saw them do it, and they threw her in the sea. I thought Zayde would be mad at me for losing her.

The butter is cool enough. Add the cake meal.

DEBRA

And the lemon?

ROSE

Yes. Zest the lemon. You need one teaspoon if you want mostly color, two if you want real flavor.

Beat.

ROSE (cont)

My baby was too small. She lived three days. I held her for three days. Then I wrapped her in a white cloth and sent her away. Away to Madeleine.

DEBRA

What was her name?

ROSE

She was too little. Check them after 14 minutes. By then they should be golden, like her hair.

Lights change.

JENNIFER

They didn't name her?

DEBRA

I don't think so. I couldn't find the real birth certificate. I asked a few more times but all she said was that it made Daddy too sad.

JENNIFER

Why didn't she ever tell us?

DEBRA

Why would she?

JENNIFER

What else is in this box? It's like I never knew her at all. When were you planning to tell me all this?

DEBRA

I don't know. I was sort of relishing knowing something you didn't. Look Jen, I came back and you didn't. So, she gave it all to me: the box, the recipes, the stories. Everyone her whole life left her and I was the only one who came back.

JENNIFER

We both left. She sent us away. "Go have the life I never could." You only came back because your career was going nowhere. You couldn't stay in a relationship. Your drinking was out of control. You only came back because you had nothing.

DEBRA

That's right, Professor Doctor Jennifer Moritz MD PhD of Columbia University, married to big shot lawyer but still a really nice guy Jeremy Levin, mother of Ruth Levin, graduated top of her class Bronx Science now pre-med at Dartmouth. That's right. You did it all, perfectly, and I did nothing. So I came crawling back to my mother who never believed in me just to claim my inheritance – a late '60s ranch house in a suburb of a dead steel town and a box of cookie recipes. You want to fight over it?

JENNIFER

I was wrong. You haven't changed at all.

JENNIFER grabs for the recipe card box. DEBRA pulls it toward herself. They struggle until the cards fall and scatter. Debra sinks to the floor to collect the cards. As she speaks, ROSE sits next to her, undetected. ROSE speaks the bold text in DEBRA's lines simultaneously - reliving/retelling - until the end of the scene.

DEBRA (with ROSE)

Back in November, when she still had a lot of clear moments, we talked about what she **wanted. For the end.** Those amazing hospice people gave me a questionnaire. Mom said **no** to everything. **No life extending measures.** She said if she could, she'd **hang on to see Ruth this summer**, but all she really cared about was not wearing diapers. She said, **if I can't make it to the toilet anymore, that's the end.**

JENNIFER

Sounds like her.

DEBRA (with ROSE)

If things got “**too disgusting**” - her words not mine - she wouldn’t want to wait it out. The last three weeks, she got pretty bad. Kept having “accidents.” Kept thinking I was you or Dad or Zayde. And then she was frantic about missing some invoice or chucking everything out of her closet looking for a pair of penny loafers she had in 1974. All over the place and **never, ever sleeping**. And I couldn’t leave her alone. Not even for ten minutes.

JENNIFER

Why didn’t you call me?

DEBRA (with ROSE)

Why didn’t you call *me*?

Dr. Chen called in something to help her sleep. She **didn’t want to take it**. Two nights ago she was screaming at me and throwing books. But finally she just **collapsed** and fell asleep on the floor in a puddle of her own....

I cleaned her up and got her into bed. Her eyes were swollen from **crying** but they fluttered open and she stared at me, like she knew it was really me, and she said “**It’s time. I’m ready. Please, help me.**”

I tucked her in. She **promised to stay in bed**. I came back in here and finished making the batter just how she taught me and crushed up some of the pills...

JENNIFER

How many?

DEBRA

I’m not sure.

JENNIFER

Two or three?

ROSE/DEBRA

I was totally exhausted.

JENNIFER

More?

DEBRA (with ROSE)

And I baked them with extra lemon. She took one bite and said “**not light enough, not enough air.**” I stretched out next to her on the bed. **She held my hand.** I immediately zonked out, and when I woke up, she was gone. The whole plate was gone.

JENNIFER

What are you ...? What are you // saying...?

DEBRA

I have no idea // if...

JENNIFER

Debra!

DEBRA (with ROSE)

All I know is that she was **gone. Quiet. Easy** for the first time, maybe // ever.

JENNIFER

Debra, how many pills?

DEBRA

I don't know exactly.

JENNIFER

You have to know. / need to know.

DEBRA

Why?

JENNIFER

Why??

DEBRA

Not the whole bottle, Jen. I had no idea she'd eat an entire batch of madeleines. But what difference does it really make? If what I gave her, if what she ate, helped her slip away, then so be it. She died peacefully in her sleep. Isn't that what everyone wants?

JENNIFER

Debra, what did you do?

DEBRA

What did I do?

I spent almost a year and a half caring for our mother. Helping her live and die.

What did I do?

Yesterday, I washed her body and wrapped it in a white cloth.

And today we sent her away. Away to Madeleine and our unnamed sister.

A long beat before transition.

SCENE 4 *(see timeline on the last page of the script for details about what happens during and in between the sections of this scene)*

Part 1 - six months after Rose's death; fall

Lights change/time passes. Sound. ROSE haunts the kitchen. She's silently going through the actions of baking.

DEBRA is taking every card out of the recipe box to photograph each one, taking notes on a laptop. As DEBRA and ROSE work, the kitchen begins to shift and the island now exists in both the Ohio kitchen and JENNIFER's kitchen in her modest NYC apartment.

ROSE continues her silent baking as she now simultaneously haunts both spaces. JENNIFER lies sleeping on the couch but then wakes up with a start, goes to the Estée Lauder mirror and "sees" ROSE.

DEBRA/JENNIFER

I can feel your disapproval, Mom.

DEBRA

It's coming in waves,

JENNIFER

no words necessary.

DEBRA/JENNIFER

I already know what you'd say if you could –

DEBRA

"Don't be such a smart-ass thinking you can put all this on a computer. Every stain, every smudge, every cross-out is a record of my process!"

JENNIFER

"Don't use your daughter as an excuse for your problems. Figure it out and move on."

JENNIFER finds her phone, which is dead, and plugs it in.

DEBRA

But paper crumbles, it gets wet with tears and it disintegrates, so I'm saving it all from destruction. You should be happy, Mom. I'm making you immortal!

My agent emailed today. Yes, I still have one. She seems pretty excited about this combo cookbook-memoir idea. You're going to have to help me decide which of these to put in.

And I can't find the chocolate meringues recipe. I'm planning to do them for the Kaplan bat mitzvah. I know it's in here somewhere.

JENNIFER's phone revives and starts pinging with voicemails and texts. She picks it up.

JENNIFER

Oh my god. It's Wednesday? I forgot to teach today. What the hell is wrong with me?

JENNIFER slumps back on the couch. At the same time, DEBRA digs through the stacks of recipe cards. ROSE pulls out the one for chocolate meringues, and puts it on the edge of the counter. When DEBRA looks up, still frustrated, she sees it.

DEBRA

Ah, here it is. I must have pulled it before. Losing my mind.

Lights change/time passes

Part 2 - one year after Rose's death; early April

DEBRA lights two yahrzeit candles and sorts through an old cardboard box of papers and photos. She pulls out a large, old envelope, and puts it on the counter. Then she takes out the madeleines shell pan. ROSE looks through the documents inside the

envelope as DEBRA calls JENNIFER who doesn't pick up her phone. JENNIFER is on her computer scanning through a genealogy site, maybe sketching out a family tree,

DEBRA

Hi Jen. I was thinking about you today. It's mom's yahrzeit. Yahrzeit is a way better word than death-iversary, don't you think?

Hey, did you ever get the mirror? I sent it over the summer.

Anyway, I'm also calling to let you know that... my book sold! Can you believe it?

I've been going through family photos to see what I might want to put in and I found an envelope with what might be immigration papers. It's all in German, but I think you'll want them. I made copies and sent you the originals.

Beat.

Look, Jen, I know the funeral was hard for both of us and all the stuff about mom really threw you, but it's been a year now and...

Anyway I have this sort of schmaltzy idea: maybe we could work on the book together a little bit. Choose some pictures, talk about which recipes...

Phone interrupts to cut off the message. DEBRA calls again.

DEBRA (cont)

Sorry, long-winded. I'm sure you're too busy, but I kind of have this dream that the book could be a way for us to start over?

I know you're not a phone person, but please call me. It's been too long, even for us.

ROSE returns the documents to the envelope and then moves the envelope into JENNIFER's half of the kitchen.

JENNIFER opens the envelope, looks through the documents and begins photographing them to upload to the genealogy site on her computer.

Lights change/time passes.

Part 3 - a year and a quarter after Rose's death; summer

DEBRA is cleaning up the kitchen. ROSE rifles through a stack of JENNIFER's unopened mail, pulls out a thick envelope, and pushes it toward JENNIFER. DEBRA calls JENNIFER but JENNIFER doesn't pick up.

DEBRA

Hey, Jen. Me, again. Did you get the manuscript? I thought if you had a hard copy it might be easier to read.

There's so much in there I want to go over with you, and the deadline for edits is looming. I really need any feedback ASAP.

You can't ignore me forever. I'm actually starting to worry about you.

JENNIFER

All of a sudden everyone's so worried about me. Jeremy. My dean. Not Ruth. (to ROSE) Is that why you keep showing up, Mom?

JENNIFER picks up the manuscript envelope, registers what it is, but doesn't open it.

Lights change/time passes.

Part 4 - two years after Rose's death; early April

DEBRA is reorganizing printed pages, marking them with corrections, cross-referencing info on her computer. She stops to light two yahrzeit candles. At the same time, JENNIFER pours herself a glass of wine, toys with the manuscript envelope, and then finally opens it.

DEBRA

I wish you were here to see this come together, Mom. I mean, I know you're here, but... Mike says it's going to be a best-seller and I'm going to get famous. So you are, too.

Tonight's the night. You ready?

DEBRA pulls out items to start making madeleines. She puts on one of Rose's aprons and finds a piece of paper in the pocket. It's Rose's poem.

DEBRA (cont)

That's where you put it.

DEBRA calls JENNIFER. At the same time JENNIFER begins reading the manuscript, dropping pages on the floor as she goes.

DEBRA

Hey Jen. I just found mom's poem. It wasn't in the recipe box but in one of her apron pockets. It's a shame it's too late to add it to the book. She could have been a published poet afterall.

It's madeleines season again. I'll send you some, if you call me back.

Seriously though, you clearly don't want to talk about the book. Fine. Your choice. But can you please just message me so I know you're alive? I mean, you were always stubborn, but this is getting ridiculous.

Are you mad at me?

Lights change/time passes.

Part 5 - two and a quarter years after Rose's death; summer

JENNIFER continues reading the manuscript. She is now surrounded by the pages piling up around her. ROSE picks up some of the tossed pages and passes them toward DEBRA's end of the counter. DEBRA puts the pages into a neat stack along with several other stacks of paper - chapters of the book - and carefully loads them into a box. We hear a timer go off, DEBRA takes a pan of cookies out of the oven. She and ROSE each taste one, slowly chewing to appraise them.

DEBRA (cont)

A pinch more salt, I think. And one minute less in the oven. But not bad. Not bad at all.

ROSE nods in agreement. DEBRA makes notes on the recipe card. She eats another cookie as she calls JENNIFER.

DEBRA (cont)

Tonight I'm testing out the recipe mom made for Ruth's baby-naming - "First Grandbaby Maple Walnut Cookies." They are delicious. I remember the ceremony.

I called Jeremy. You left me no choice. He assured me you are alive, but didn't elaborate beyond "there's a lot going on, and I shouldn't take things personally." Which automatically makes me think I should take it that way. So what *is* going on, Jen? What is so awful that you can't pick up the phone even once in two years?

We hear the ping of an incoming call. She accepts it.

DEBRA (cont)

Jen? Oh my god, Jen, I was just leaving you a message. How the hell are // you?

JENNIFER

What do you think you're doing?

DEBRA

What?

JENNIFER

What do you think you're doing with this so-called book?

DEBRA

You read it?

JENNIFER

Enough to get the idea.

DEBRA

And...?

JENNIFER

It's disgusting. You think people want to read this. Your stupid sob story, poor you, poor drunk failed writer who was a screw up her whole life? You think you're brave airing all your trivial and revolting secrets? You think anyone cares?

DEBRA

JENNIFER

I had no idea how desperate you really are for attention. How pathetic.

DEBRA

Jen...

JENNIFER

And Mom would hate this. She wouldn't want you telling all her stories, sharing her recipes. She'd despise you even more than she already // did.

DEBRA

Jen, are you drunk?

JENNIFER

This isn't about // me.

DEBRA

Have you been // drinking?

JENNIFER

This is about me protecting mom from your greed.

DEBRA

What?

JENNIFER

You have to stop it. I forbid you to publish this garbage.

DEBRA

You can't // just...

JENNIFER

You are monetizing our mother's death and pilfering her intellectual property // and...

DEBRA

No, no, that's // not...

JENNIFER

and telling half-truths and outright lies about her, about our family, without permission.

DEBRA

No, Jen. That's not true. You've had two years to raise any objections // and...

JENNIFER

You're the same cheap-ass, can't-do-your-own-work-so-steal-it-from-someone-else-loser you always were.

DEBRA

What are you even talking // about?

JENNIFER

And you've cut me out of it completely.

DEBRA

I don't // understand...

JENNIFER

You have no right // to...

DEBRA

You're too late, Jen. It's too late to make any changes // and...

JENNIFER

I will sue you.

DEBRA

You cannot be serious.

JENNIFER

Then how about I call your publisher and tell them you killed our mother with an overdose of sleeping pills.

Longish pause.

DEBRA

I have to go.

JENNIFER

Don't hang up on me.

DEBRA

If you want to call me back when you've sobered up, we can talk then, but right // now...

JENNIFER

Don't you dare, hang up on me!

DEBRA clicks off.

JENNIFER (cont)

Please, don't hang up! Please.

Deb, please. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I...

Pause.

JENNIFER realizes DEBRA is gone. JENNIFER calls again twice, three times in rapid succession but DEBRA silences her phone.

DEBRA slides the cookies off the tray into the garbage can. She pulls out another recipe card and begins baking.

At the same time, JENNIFER sits on the couch and begins to tear up the remaining pages of the manuscript. The scraps of paper pile up around her. Then she takes the envelope of immigration papers and starts to tear them, too, but ROSE stops her.

Lights change/time passes.

Part 6 - two and a half years after Rose's death; September

DEBRA opens a cardboard box full of new hardcover books while ROSE watches. At the same time, JENNIFER spreads the immigration documents out in front of her and logs onto her computer.

DEBRA

(to ROSE) Everyone always says nothing compares to this moment, and now I get it. Almost three years to birth this baby, and here it is! Our book, out in the world. See, it's you – it's Hot House Rose.

JENNIFER makes a call.

JENNIFER

Hello.

I'm sorry, I don't speak Spanish.

I'm trying to reach Lilia Kaminsky.

This is Jennifer. Jennifer Moritz. In New York.

Hi, hi yes. Yes, I got your message. I'm really sorry it's taken me so long to get in touch. I hope it's okay I called. Is it okay? I mean, is this a good time? I just didn't want to wait any...

Okay, okay. Good.

Any chance you have a few minutes to talk now?

Great.

Yeah, so I guess the big question is: Is your Aharon Greenberg the same person as my Zayde?

Lights change. Sound that shifts into some version of "Take Me Back to Manhattan."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xe-iE1nCR8> (start at 0:35)

DEBRA exits and ROSE transforms into LILIA as the kitchen island moves again and we land fully in JENNIFER's apartment.

SCENE 5

A late afternoon in early Spring almost three years after ROSE's death.

LILIA is suspended for a moment in stillness, spotlighted in JENNIFER's kitchen. As the music fades, she begins to softly hum "Take Me Back to Manhattan." JENNIFER gazes into the Estée Lauder mirror at first searching for something in her own face, but then registering the humming and LILIA's "reflection." She startles thinking she's seeing ROSE. LILIA speaks with an elegant Argentinian accent.

LILIA

Is everything okay?

JENNIFER

(snapping back to the moment). Yeah, yeah. Sorry.

LILIA pours coffee from a French press into two cups.

LILIA

If you don't mind me saying, you look like you need this coffee even more than I do. What do you take? Cream? Sugar?

JENNIFER

Just black, please. Sorry, I'm not sure there's // any...

LILIA

I brought it all. I told you I'd provide the treats.

LILIA takes cream, sugar, and two packages of rugelach out of a shopping bag, preferably Zabar's branded.

JENNIFER

I can't believe you're actually here. In my kitchen.

LILIA

I hope it is okay that I've charged in and taken over.

JENNIFER

It's good to have someone here. It's good to have *you* here. Though honestly it still doesn't feel real.

LILIA

Thank God and the internet, we found each other. I'm only sorry it took six months for me to get here.

She opens the packages of rugelach to put some on a plate.

LILIA (cont)

I couldn't decide between the chocolate and the raisin. Which do you like better?

JENNIFER

My mom usually made apricot but she was renowned for how tender she could make the dough.

LILIA

Then these won't be nearly as good as hers. You know, I wasn't even planning to go to Zabar's but I walked by and there was Debra's book, right in the window surrounded by packages of rugelach. And when I checked out, the most incredible thing: all the cashiers were stuffing these into every bag.

She shows JENNIFER a flyer for a book signing with Debra's photo. She reads:

LILIA (cont)

An evening with Debra Moritz, author of *Hot House Rose: A Year in My Mother's Kitchen*. 92nd Street Y. 7:30 PM Wednesday, March... wait, that's tomorrow.

JENNIFER

Yeah, she's in town.

LILIA

So you already know. And you were not going to tell me? When you know perfectly well that I want nothing more than to have time with you. Both of you.

Beat.

Jennifer?

JENNIFER

Sorry. I wasn't...

LILA

What?

JENNIFER

I don't know.

LILIA

But you are going tomorrow.

JENNIFER

No. I can't.

LILIA

But you must.

JENNIFER

I told you, we haven't seen each other since mom....

LILIA

And now she's in your backyard, so you put on your shoes and you go.

JENNIFER

I can't.

LILIA

Why?

JENNIFER

Debra and I aren't speaking.

LILIA

At all?

JENNIFER

Not for almost a year, and really not even for the two years before that.

LILIA

I knew things were strained between you but why didn't you tell me your link was completely broken?

JENNIFER

I don't know. Probably because it's my fault. She kept trying but I shut her out, and then when I finally called I said some horrendous things that I cannot unsay. And she doesn't know anything about what's going on here, with me or Ruth... I can't just show up // and...

LILIA

You most certainly can. You cannot let any more time pass. It will only get harder.

JENNIFER

I don't think I can do it. I'm afraid // I'll...

LILIA

What?

JENNIFER

Make a fool of myself?

LILIA

(unimpressed) – –

JENNIFER

I'm afraid she'll walk out as soon as she sees me.

LILIA

You can survive that and then try again.

JENNIFER

I wish I had your confidence. I'm sure she's still furious with me, and I can't blame her. You don't understand.

LILIA

I'm sorry. Perhaps I am too presumptuous. You didn't ask for my advice.

Awkward pause.

JENNIFER

(searching) What if you come with me?

LILIA

Oh no, I don't think that // would be...

JENNIFER

It would be easier for me if you were there.

LILIA

May I speak freely?

JENNIFER

Okay.

LILIA

You might not like what I have to say. But I am getting old and I have strong opinions. Well, I've always had those but...

JENNIFER

Go ahead.

LILIA

Listen to me carefully, *mi chica*. You will not return to having your feet under you until you make this step. You must go. You must see her and endure her anger and look in her eyes and ask for forgiveness. She deserves that and you need it even more. It is between the two of you.

JENNIFER

But...

LILIA

You have no idea what I would have given to have known my sister, to have had the chance to see her and hear her voice. I lost her before I even knew she was mine. Don't lose Debra. You're going to need her.

JENNIFER

I don't know.

LILIA

But I *do* know. Please do as I say. I have learned some things in this life.

LILIA (cont)

Besides, I want to meet her while I'm here. Until that day you called me, I thought I had no family left on this earth. Now I'm collecting up the pieces of my *mishpocha* and it's time we put ourselves back together.

But you must talk to her first. And then I want to tell her how beautiful her book is.

LILIA pulls a copy of Debra's book out of her bag.

JENNIFER

You have a copy?

LILIA

Of course. I read it on my flight here. You do know it's very good, yes?

JENNIFER

I don't think I have an unbiased opinion.

LILIA

Well, then I'm telling you, it's brilliant. The writing is brilliant and honest. I suspect the writer is, too. Don't lose her, Jennifer. And if you won't do that for yourself - which really would make you a fool - then do it for me.

Beat.

JENNIFER

Okay.

Okay. I'll go.

LILIA pulls JENNIFER into a tentative hug.

LILIA

Mein gute meyd!

SCENE 6

DEBRA tiredly sinks into a chair at a table near the edge of the playing space, where she's been signing books all evening. She begins to stack the remaining copies, to put away her pen, etc. JENNIFER, who has been observing her from the back of the actual audience seating, approaches with a copy of DEBRA's book in hand.

JENNIFER

Hey.

DEBRA

I thought I saw you in the back, but I figured there was no way you'd have the chutzpah to show up here.

JENNIFER

Yeah, well, I almost didn't. But I thought it was time for me to...

Awkward pause.

JENNIFER (cont)

Nice turn out tonight. I don't know how you have the patience. I counted. You just signed 157 books and talked to every one of those people.

DEBRA

Just part of the job. If you're lucky.

JENNIFER

So, *Hot House Rose: A Year in My Mother's Kitchen*. I thought it was sixteen months and // six days.

DEBRA

A compromise, believe me. Marketing says it has to be a "year in where ever" or no one'll buy it. *A Year in Provence*. *My Year in Space*...

JENNIFER

Not even the "the *last* year in my mother's // kitchen?"

DEBRA

Too depressing.

JENNIFER

It's just that you were so specific about recording the amount // of time...

DEBRA

I haven't seen you in three years. Is this really what you came here for?

JENNIFER
What?

DEBRA
To criticize the title?

JENNIFER
No. No, of course not. // I...

DEBRA
Okay then. I'll pass along the feedback.

DEBRA busies herself with the books.

JENNIFER
Why didn't you tell me you'd be in town?

DEBRA

JENNIFER
Deb, I ...

DEBRA
—

JENNIFER
It's been a tough // ...

DEBRA
I was waiting for the "cease and desist" letter from your in-house counsel, but then Jeremy's too much of a mensch.

JENNIFER
Jeremy loved it.

DEBRA
He always liked me.

Awkward pause.

JENNIFER

Where're you staying?

DEBRA

Downtown.

JENNIFER

How long are you here?

DEBRA

Another week.

JENNIFER

You know you can always stay // with us.

DEBRA

I have to go.

JENNIFER

Deb, I'm sorry. My response was angry and heartless, I've been in a... it's been a really rough stretch and...

You were great tonight. You look great. It's fantastic that you got the book done, and sold, and that you're getting all // this...

DEBRA

How did you even know I was here?

JENNIFER

I'm on the mailing list.

DEBRA

And you just happened to be free this particular Wednesday evening?

JENNIFER

I'm on a sort of "break".

DEBRA

Ah, a sabbatical. How nice for you.

JENNIFER

Actually a leave of absence. Not entirely my choice.

DEBRA

Oh.

JENNIFER

And I needed to see you because I wanted to apologize.

DEBRA

That's a first.

JENNIFER

And I wanted to ask if we could get together, just to talk. It's not that late, maybe we could // go...

DEBRA

I have an early meeting with my agent.

JENNIFER

Just a quick glass of wine? Or coffee //... sorry.

DEBRA

52 months sober. I've got plans.

JENNIFER

Tomorrow? After your // meeting...?

DEBRA

Sales are going pretty well. I'll be able to write you a check for the house // and...

JENNIFER

It's not that much anymore.

DEBRA

Maybe not for you.

JENNIFER

I think you have a false impression of my lifestyle.

DEBRA

Oh please. A doctor-lawyer couple with an apartment on West End Ave. You probably make more in one year than // I do in...

JENNIFER

It's a lot less than you think. A pediatrics professor and a guy who does mostly pro bono work for nonprofits with an inherited, rent-controlled apartment and a college kid. That's called barely getting by in this city. You lived here all those years. // You know ...

DEBRA

Spare me the
"I-earned-this-all-myself-by-working-hard-we-started-with-the-same-nothing" speech // because...

JENNIFER

That's not what I was // going to...

DEBRA

You know what? I can't do this with you.

She grabs her belongings and begins to exit.

JENNIFER

Deb, wait. Please. Please!
How about Saturday afternoon? My place? There's someone I want you to meet.

DEBRA

So, you don't actually want to grovel for my forgiveness over lattes, you're suddenly Yenta the matchmaker?

JENNIFER

No, no, it's not // that...

DEBRA

Because if you'd bothered to check in with me at all, or look at Facebook like any normal middle-aged person, you'd know that Mike Shapiro and // I...

JENNIFER

Did you get married?

DEBRA

No. But he wants to.

JENNIFER

And you?

DEBRA

Happy with how it is. So whoever you wanted to fix me up with will just have to get back on SawYouAtSinai.com or whatever. Besides, I'd never move back here.

JENNIFER

She doesn't live here. And she's in her 70s and happily independent. I'm not sure you're her type. But she is very interested // in meeting...

DEBRA

Who is this?

JENNIFER

A fellow writer. A poet from Argentina.

DEBRA

And you know her because?

JENNIFER

Just come Saturday. It's important.
I'll get the whitefish platter from Barney Greengrass.

DEBRA

Are you bribing me?

JENNIFER

12:30ish?

DEBRA

—

JENNIFER

Extra pickles? And bialys?

DEBRA

—

JENNIFER

Please?

DEBRA

Are you begging?

JENNIFER

If that's what it takes.

Beat.

DEBRA

I don't know, Jen. I don't think you get off that easy.

DEBRA exits.

SCENE 7

Saturday at 12:30. JENNIFER's apartment. She is on the phone.

JENNIFER

(on phone) If you don't think she's making any real progress, then why...?

Jeremy, she's been there for almost six months. I don't know how much more we can take against my retirement...

No, it's not about the money. How can you say that? Of course I want what's best but how do we even know...

I would, but she won't return my calls...

Maybe you could talk to someone in the parents' group and get some...

Intercom buzzes.

JENNIFER (cont)

I gotta go. I'll call you later and...

Lilia's here.

Okay. Just tell Ruth I love her. Please.

We hear knocking.

JENNIFER (cont)

Maybe you should just come home and we can...
Sorry. Bye.

JENNIFER opens the door, surprised to find DEBRA.

JENNIFER (cont)

Oh. Hi. It's you.
Sorry. I was on the phone with Jeremy.

DEBRA

No problem.

JENNIFER

You came.

DEBRA

Yep.

JENNIFER

I didn't think you would.

DEBRA

I'd made up my mind not to, but it was almost like I could feel mom nudging me onto the uptown train.

Awkward beat.

JENNIFER

I just put the platter in the fridge.

She offers a paper bag.

JENNIFER (cont)

Bialy?

DEBRA pulls out a bialy. Smells it deeply. Pulls it apart and takes a huge bite.

DEBRA

(mouth full) Proof of God's existence.

Awkward beat.

JENNIFER

I just got home. Services went long.

DEBRA

You were at shul?

JENNIFER

I started going every once in a while to say kaddish for mom.

DEBRA

Seriously?

JENNIFER

Yeah. Weird, I know. Do you ever...?

DEBRA

No. But I light candles on her *yahrzeit*. One for her and one for our sister since the dates are so close.

JENNIFER

Our sister. I still don't even know how to feel about all of that.

DEBRA

Me neither. I wish she had a name.

JENNIFER

It's good that you think about her.

DEBRA

Yeah. It's hard to describe what it feels like to grieve someone you never knew.

JENNIFER

It's the same thing with Dad really. Especially for you.

DEBRA

Do you say kaddish for him?

JENNIFER

I don't even know when his *yahrzeit* is. The winter sometime? I remember snow.

DEBRA

December. Close to Zayde's, too. Mom had all the dates on a card. She always lit candles for both of them.

JENNIFER

Do you remember Dad at all?

DEBRA

Not really. Just from photos I think. Not actual memories. Do you?

JENNIFER

A few very specific moments. Like my fifth birthday party. No one else's dad hired ponies for rides in your own backyard.

DEBRA

I only know good stories about him.

JENNIFER

That's the way it's supposed to be. That's what the rabbi said just this morning. That really it's our obligation to remember our parents in the best light we can.

DEBRA

That's a lot easier if someone only exists in photos of ponies and lit up cakes.

JENNIFER

I always liked the one of him in the fedora leaning on that old car.

DEBRA

Me, too. He was flashing his mischievous eye sparkle.

JENNIFER

You got that from him.

DEBRA

You think so?

DEBRA tries flashing a mischievous eye sparkle.

DEBRA (cont)

Sometimes I wonder what else I got from him, because I sure as hell didn't inherit much from mom. As she often liked to remind me. But she and I both love a really good deli brunch. Of this, she would approve.

JENNIFER

To mom.

DEBRA

To mom.

They "clink" bialys. DEBRA takes another bite of bialy but JENNIFER sets hers aside.

DEBRA (cont)

I had no idea you ever went to services at all.

JENNIFER

I didn't but now, I find the prayers oddly comforting. At least it gets me out of the house.

Beat.

DEBRA

You redid the kitchen.

JENNIFER

A few years ago. You know Jeremy likes to cook, so he // wanted...

DEBRA

And it's immaculate. No schmutzy hands in here.

JENNIFER

Easy to keep clean when you don't use it.

DEBRA

At all?

JENNIFER

I'm basically subsisting on smoothies and coffee.

DEBRA looks in the fridge.

DEBRA

And Chardonnay apparently.

She pokes her head out with one pickle in her mouth and another in her hand.

DEBRA (cont)

Want one?

JENNIFER

No, thanks. I'll wait.

DEBRA

Jeremy's not making his burn-your-lips-off curry anymore?

JENNIFER

He's on a project down in DC. But I'm stellar with a French press and the Vitamix.

DEBRA

You don't look stellar.

JENNIFER

Thanks. I know. I don't think I've slept this year.

DEBRA

You want to tell me what's going on?

JENNIFER

Coffee?

DEBRA

No, I'm fine. Jeremy was calling from DC?

JENNIFER

He's actually visiting Ruth.

DEBRA

Is she about to graduate?

JENNIFER

No. She's not at school right now.

DEBRA

Traveling?

JENNIFER

She's in Colorado. Turns out pre-med at Dartmouth was not the perfect fit.

DEBRA

Oh.

The intercom buzzes.

JENNIFER

Good, she's here.

DEBRA

The Chilean poet?

JENNIFER

Argentine. But she's been everywhere.

We hear knocking. JENNIFER opens the door and LILIA enters wearing something colorful. They hug. She moves into the room and stands across from DEBRA, who freezes, staring, probably drops her pickle or bialy.

LILIA

This is now the response I expect from the Moritz girls. Your sister stared at me exactly the same way when she met me at the airport. Don't worry, I take no offense.

LILIA laughs and gives DEBRA an encompassing hug.

LILIA (cont)

(to JENNIFER) Get her some water. She's in shock. You should have warned her.

DEBRA

I'm sorry, it's just...

LILIA

No importa. I look just like her, no?

DEBRA

Perdón. No quería ser maleducada ...
(I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude...)

LILIA

Vos hablás castellano.
(You speak Spanish.)

DEBRA

Sólo un poquito. Hice algunos reportajes sobre la ciudad de Méjico para *Food and Wine*. (Just a bit. I did a few stories about Mexico City for *Food and Wine*.)

LILIA

*Ah, los tacos de carne con // **papas fritas***
(Ah, the steak tacos topped with // french fries)

DEBRA

¡Papas fritas! ¿Vos también sos amante de la comida?
(French fries! You love food, too?)

LILIA

¿Acaso no lo son todos los judíos?
(Don't all Jews?)

DEBRA

Es lo que siempre pensé, pero parece que mi hermana no.
(That's what I always thought, but apparently not my sister.)

They laugh.

JENNIFER

Are you talking about me?

DEBRA

Maybe.

JENNIFER

Coffee?

LILIA

Please.

DEBRA

Who are you?

LILIA

What has she told you?

DEBRA

Only that you're a poet from Argentina and that she's not trying to set us up on a date. But she didn't say anything about you looking exactly // like...

LILIA

Then I suppose we must start at the very beginning. But before I forget, will you please sign my copy.

She pulls DEBRA's book from her bag.

LILIA (cont)

It was the perfect introduction to the family. Your writing has such energy and rhythm, so imagistic. I feel as if I have visited your home, like I already know you, and your mother, too.

DEBRA

Thank you. Let me grab a pen.

DEBRA rummages in her bag and pulls out a Sharpie.

LILIA

I spell it L-I-L-I-A. My mother named me Leah Ruchel, but I transformed myself into a flower. Like your mother. Rose.

JENNIFER

Yeah but Rose was all thorns.

DEBRA

Most of the time anyway.

DEBRA finishes signing the book, looks up to LILIA's face.

DEBRA (cont)

So you are?

LILIA

Lilia Kaminsky. A pleasure to make your acquaintance. Tonight you will come with your sister to my reading and I will make a gift of my book to you.

DEBRA

You have a reading tonight?

LILIA

Yes. Jennifer worked very hard to arrange this visit for me through the university, though I would have made the trip anyway even if I had to spend my very last peso. And now this unexpected delight of getting to meet you, too. As the wise ones say, there are no coincidences, just God acting sneaky.

JENNIFER

I petitioned some colleagues in Spanish and Creative Writing to bring her here as a visiting artist. It wasn't hard to convince them, she's got an international reputation.

LILIA

For what, I cannot say, but after all these years, it's true, some people do know my work.

JENNIFER

She's being modest.

DEBRA

You met online?

JENNIFER

Yeah. A Jewish genealogy site. I've always been curious about that stuff but then I was so surprised by mom's "secret" that I sort of got obsessed, wanting to know what else I didn't know and...

LILIA

And just like you, right before she died, I discovered my mother had a secret that sent me searching for the possibility of family. I'd nearly given up hope, and then Jennifer found me.

DEBRA

And you're our mother's doppelganger because...?

LILIA

Because I'm her sister.

DEBRA

What?

They eat as they talk. JENNIFER has moved on to wine, refilling her glass little bits at a time. DEBRA takes note.

LILIA

Three years ago, my mother, Rivka, - she almost made it to 90, *kinahora* - is on her deathbed and she's singing one Yiddish song over and over:

She sings. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUVEq6NC7mM> (start at 1:00)

LILIA (cont)

*Bei mir bistu sheyn*³

DEBRA

Mom sang that all the time while she was baking.

JENNIFER

Yeah, and Zayde, too, remember?

DEBRA

Yeah, you're right.

LILIA

So my mother's singing it again and again, and then she starts telling me all about Aharon Greenberg. The man who wooed her with this song.

³ *Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn* lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, music by Shalom Secunda, 1934. Producers are responsible for obtaining any necessary permissions to play a recording of or for performance of this song.

LILA (cont)

My whole life she told me my father had died right after the war while they were waiting for passage to Buenos Aires. But 67 years later, there's no mention of my dead father. She's only talking about Aharon Greenberg, the man with the irresistible voice. And I realize she's confessing to me about her tryst in a DP camp. She and Aharon were "jodiendo sobre la tumba." Do you have this expression in English?

DEBRA

Screwing on the grave?

LILIA

Sí. I think they knew each other for only a few days. Strangers who needed each others' bodies to know they were still alive.

I asked my mother what else she remembered about him and the only thing was that he was on his way to someplace cold called Ohio with his little daughter Rose. I started searching Aharon Greenberg Ohio and a few listings came up but the dates weren't right. I left a message in a group asking for any information. Nothing. And then this last September, a phone call from this one.

JENNIFER

With no classes, I had time to dig around again and I stumbled onto Lilia's post. We already knew they'd changed Greenberg to Green.

DEBRA

Right.

JENNIFER

But then I figured out Aharon changed his first name, too.

DEBRA

Zayde was Aharon? But who chooses the name "Harold"? Are you sure?

JENNIFER

Yeah.

DEBRA

I don't quite see how it all fits together.

LILIA

Let's make a tree.

LILIA grabs the Sharpie and a roll of paper towels from the kitchen counter.

LILIA (cont)

(to JENNIFER) Do you have any tape?

JENNIFER finds a roll of tape in a kitchen drawer as LILIA tears off one paper towel and writes "AHARON/HAROLD" on it as big as possible.

LILIA (cont)

Okay, Jennifer, you stand here.

LILIA hands the "AHARON/HAROLD" paper to JENNIFER and gestures for her to tape it below her belly button so it hangs down between her legs.

LILIA (cont)

We start at the root with Aharon, or your Zayde Harold, the singer.

LILIA writes "CHANNAH" on a paper towel, and "RIVKA" on another. She motions for JENNIFER to tape each one to either side of her belly button.

JENNIFER

Channah was mom's mom who died in Germany.

LILIA

And Rivka was my mother who escaped to Buenos Aires.

LILIA writes "ROSE" and "LILIA" on separate towels. DEBRA helps JENNIFER tape them onto her shoulders.

DEBRA

Okay, I see. You and mom.

LILIA

Now Jennifer, lift your Rose-side arm - that's your branch - and shift your head a little to that side. Good..

Debra, put your head near the elbow.

And to finish...

LILIA writes "SISTER" on a towel and tapes it to JENNIFER's outstretched hand.

Beat. DEBRA breaks the pose.

DEBRA

You know about that.

LILIA

Of course.

Beat.

DEBRA

(to LILIA) Okay. Now I get it. You're mom's younger half sister. Our aunt.

JENNIFER

Mom and Zayde left on one boat to the US...

LILIA

And I was a surprise stowaway in my mama's womb on the way to South America.

JENNIFER

Two boats, two entirely different lives.

Can you imagine if Lilia had found out in time and called Mom?

She probably would have accused you of playing a prank, and then hung up. She probably would have picked on you as a kid.

LILIA

I wouldn't have cared. I would have loved someone to fight with. For me, being an only child was lonely.

(to JENNIFER) Speaking of which, any word from Ruth?

JENNIFER

No.

DEBRA

I thought you said she was in Colorado.

JENNIFER

She is. Look, I don't want to...

DEBRA

What's going on?

A look between JENNIFER and LILIA.

LILIA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...

DEBRA

Jen?

JENNIFER

Later.

Awkward beat.

LILIA

It's time for me to go. I need to rest before tonight.

JENNIFER

Do you want to take any food // with you?

LILIA

No, no thank you. I don't eat before. I still get nervous. Do you, Debra? Before a reading?

DEBRA

Sometimes.

JENNIFER

You sure you don't want to take a bialy for later?

LILIA

(teasing) Stop being such a Jewish mother.

LILIA collects her bag, grabs her signed copy of DEBRA's book.

LILIA (cont)

Debra, you'll come with us for dinner after.

DEBRA

Maybe.

LILIA

I insist!

She pulls them each into a hug, and looks at them standing together.

LILIA (cont)

¡Mis chicas! Mein meydeles!

LILIA stops to look in the mirror, puts on lipstick, and pops her lips.

LILIA (cont)

Now I can go.

Blows kisses.

LILIA (cont)

Tonight!

LILIA exits. Silence. JENNIFER goes to the fridge to refill her wine glass and starts cleaning up.

DEBRA

Don't you think you've had // enough.

JENNIFER

Don't.

DEBRA

What the hell's going on with // Ruth?

JENNIFER

I'm not sure I want to talk about it.

DEBRA

Seems like you've done plenty of talking already. With a complete stranger.

JENNIFER

I should've known you'd try to ruin // this...

DEBRA

Ruin what? Your delusion of an enchanting fantasy mother who smothers you in physical affection and tells you everything will be alright?

JENNIFER

What's wrong with wanting that?

DEBRA

Let me get this straight. You can't pick up your phone to call me for over two years, and what - in a few days, you've told this woman family secrets and more about your life than you've shared with me for decades?

JENNIFER

We've been emailing and talking on the phone for months.

DEBRA

How much time did you spend setting up this reading for her? And you somehow couldn't manage to read a single draft of my book?

JENNIFER

She understands what I've been going through. She's been helpful. She knows how to shut up and just listen.

Beat.

DEBRA

I can do that.

JENNIFER

Yeah, right.

DEBRA

Try me.

DEBRA stops JENNIFER from cleaning up. They sit together.

JENNIFER

Ruth's in a step-down program. She struggled all through her first year at school. That's why she didn't come with me to mom's funeral. But we thought she was better over that summer. She went back to start the next fall, and just completely crashed. Middle of the

JENNIFER (cont)

night call from the ER. I mean, we knew she was smoking some pot in high school. We thought she was handling the pressure fine, her grades were good, test scores, but... Anyway, anxiety, depression, more self-medicating. You never think it's going to be your own kid.

DEBRA

I am so sorry. I had no idea.

JENNIFER

Of course you didn't. And that's what was running in the background when you sent me the book, and I think I just lost my mind when I finally called you and...

DEBRA

Maybe you don't actually think I'm "monetizing our mother's death."

JENNIFER

I'm sorry, Deb. I really am. I'm a disaster. I didn't think I could be, but I am, a complete and total... Jeremy is sick of it. Of me. Ruth won't even talk to me now.

DEBRA

Why? Isn't she doing // better?

JENNIFER

It's my fault. All of it.

DEBRA

I cannot imagine that's true. But then again you are never wrong.

Beat.

DEBRA (cont)

Sorry.

JENNIFER gets up.

DEBRA (cont)

Jen, I'm sorry.

JENNIFER

My mistake, to think that you'd care. I know you're still mad at me.

DEBRA

But why didn't you tell me right away. After everything I've gone through. Maybe I could have helped.

JENNIFER

You were already taking care of mom. And to be honest Deb, you've never been especially reliable. And I had Jeremy so...

DEBRA

So you didn't need me. You never have.

JENNIFER

Jeremy's gone.

DEBRA

You said he's visiting // Ruth.

JENNIFER

Yeah. But he's not really living here anymore.

DEBRA

Since when?

JENNIFER

It's been happening slowly over the last few years, but we've been fighting over what to do with Ruth, and he just sort of let me go. I've been in a pretty deep hole since mom died and...

She starts to get emotional but pulls back.

JENNIFER (cont)

I don't want to... Maybe later we // can...

DEBRA

Okay. Only if you want.

JENNIFER

Can you come tonight? To the reading?

DEBRA

Yeah. If you want me to.

JENNIFER

It's Lilia's last night in town. I made a reservation at Sylvia's for after.

DEBRA

Ahh, the chicken livers with grits.

JENNIFER

It starts at 7:30 in Dodge Hall. You know where it is?

DEBRA

I'll find it.

She collects her things to leave.

DEBRA (cont)

Thanks for telling me // what's going ...

JENNIFER

Please, just go before I get too upset to leave the house.

DEBRA exits. JENNIFER crumples onto the couch, but then pulls herself together and leaves her apartment which might temporarily disappear behind a scrim.

SCENE 8

LILIA enters with a notebook and small stack of slim books, and stands at a podium at the front edge of the playing area. JENNIFER and DEBRA greet each other and sit together in the first row of the actual audience seating to watch LILIA.

LILIA

If you'll indulge one more, I'd like to finish tonight with something brand-new. I'll give you just a taste of the original Spanish first.

LILIA (cont)

The working title is Siempre pensé

Siempre pensé que tendría una hija
Porque nunca tuve una hermana
Porque nunca tuve un padre

Porque mi madre, *mein mame*
No me hacía compañía
En mi nuevo mundo de
Nuevas palabras
fluyendo con
flores luminosas
Y el olor a mar.

And now a rough translation.

I Always Thought

I always thought I'd have a daughter
Because I never had a sister
Because I never had a father
Because my mother, *mein mame*
Didn't keep me company
In my new world of
New words
Flowing with
bright flowers
And the smell of ocean
She lived elsewhere
In the same house
But with the old words, *vorn alt*
Rough with
Dark *memeriz*
And the smell of *ash*

I always thought I'd have a daughter
Because I wanted a friend, *una amiga*
Who knew me from the inside
Who would keep me company
In my no longer new world

LILIA (cont)

Rising like
The mountains
And the smell of spicy soup.
She would live here
In the same house
And teach me
New words, *nuevas palabras*
Shining like
Traffic lights in rain puddles
And the smell of ceibo

I always thought I'd have a daughter
But I only give birth to
Sounds, *klangn, sonidos*
That
Tumble and roll
Stumble and walk
Run
then fly
Away from me.

Beat.

LILIA (cont)

Gracias. Thank you.

*As DEBRA stands and applauds (hopefully the rest of the audience claps, too)
JENNIFER becomes visibly upset and runs out of the space. DEBRA looks after her
with concern but doesn't follow. DEBRA and LILIA exchange a look .*

SCENE 9

Back in JENNIFER's apartment late the same night. In dim light we hear a cell phone ringing with incoming calls, pinging with incoming texts. JENNIFER is sitting on her couch, an empty wine glass and two empty wine bottles nearby. She turns off her phone. She goes to look at herself in the mirror. She stares for a long moment, then frantically searches her bag and pulls out a tube of lipstick. She circles her lips, going way outside the lines, drawing a grotesque mouth.

Sound. In the mirror she sees ROSE working silently in the kitchen. JENNIFER watches ROSE for several minutes, then talks to ROSE's "reflection."

JENNIFER

Mom?

ROSE doesn't respond. Continues working.

JENNIFER (cont)

Mom?!

You have to leave me alone.

Please.

Please stop coming.

I need to...

I can't...

Or if you're here, can you help me?

Please?

Help me.

ROSE looks at JENNIFER for a moment. Then goes back to her tasks.

JENNIFER grabs one of the empty wine bottles, raises it as if to smash the mirror.

Lights change and we hear very loud shattering of glass.

SCENE 10

The next morning. Loud knocking on the apartment door. JENNIFER is passed out on the couch, a bloody dish towel wrapped around her foot.

DEBRA

(from off) Jen! Jennifer. Open up. Are you in there? I need you to open up.

Silence. JENNIFER begins to rouse, disoriented. More knocking.

DEBRA (cont)

(from off) Jen? Please.

Silence. JENNIFER slowly rises and limps toward the door. More knocking.

DEBRA (cont)

I need you to let me in. The neighbors are going to call the cops if I keep banging.

JENNIFER opens the door. DEBRA takes in the broken glass and JENNIFER's ragged state.

DEBRA (cont)

What the hell happened here?

She sees the bloody towel.

DEBRA (cont)

Oh my god. Are you okay?

JENNIFER looks toward the kitchen for ROSE who is gone, and then at DEBRA as though she's not sure who she is.

DEBRA (cont)

Jen?

JENNIFER sobs, barely able to catch her breath. She covers her face in embarrassment. DEBRA gently guides JENNIFER to the couch. JENNIFER completely collapses into DEBRA, who holds her awkwardly at first and then fiercely.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry.

DEBRA

You want to tell me...?

JENNIFER tries to pull herself together but is not doing a good job of it.

DEBRA (cont)

It's okay.

JENNIFER tries to breathe. Maybe DEBRA gets up to get her a glass of water.

JENNIFER

Last night. At the reading. That's the second time it's happened. It's like all of a sudden someone drops a boulder on my chest. And then a black curtain closes in on both sides. And I can't catch my breath. And then I just have to get out before I...

The first time was this winter. I went to see Ruth. She invited me out for a weekend. They were sharing some of what they'd been writing in art therapy. A prompt about a

JENNIFER (cont)

time they felt safe. And Ruth gets up in front of everyone and reads her story about being six years old at her grandmother's house. The spicy smell of ginger molasses crisps coming out of the oven. Hot, sticky, melt in her mouth right off the pan. Singing with the old records. Lighting the Shabbat candles and seeing her reflection in the window wavering above in the heat of the flames. She felt a deep connection to her grandmother even though they hardly ever saw each other. That her mother thought she was protecting her from someone damaged by keeping her away but instead her mother cut her off from the warmth of that kitchen. And then, she wasn't even allowed to go to her grandma's funeral.

My mother, Ruth kept saying. My mother. My mother. My mother. She wouldn't look at me, but I could feel everyone else in the room staring, searing me with their judgment.

And then, some other kid brings out a guitar and the two of them sing some rewritten version of "Don't Fence Me In." And Ruth's voice is so clear and beautiful that it feels like my heart actually splinters. I'm sure I'm hemorrhaging from the chest and then the heaviness rushes in and I can't breathe and I run out.

And she thinks it's because I'm angry, but I'm not. Not at her. She thinks I can't see how hard she's trying. But I can't breathe and no words come out. I'm like stone. Like the cold hard stone when mom looks at me.

I swear I'm turning into her. On the street I see my reflection in the windows and I can't breathe because I think it's her. I look in that damned mirror and she's there in the kitchen staring back at me. And I ask her for help but she... Nothing. She offers nothing.

Beat.

DEBRA

You see her? You see mom?

JENNIFER

Yeah. She comes but I don't know why.

DEBRA

How often?

JENNIFER

A lot. Usually when I'm really... when I've had way too much and...

DEBRA

And she never says anything?

JENNIFER

No. Just stares. Then ignores. But I keep thinking maybe she needs something from me. And as usual I can't get it right.

Beat.

JENNIFER (cont)

Deb, what happened that night? The night she died?

DEBRA

I told you.

JENNIFER

But did you do it on purpose? Like were you trying // to...

DEBRA

We were both physically and emotionally overwhelmed. She needed to sleep so desperately, and so did I.

You still think I did something wrong.

JENNIFER

No, no. I don't think so. You were there with her all that time. You knew her so well by then that....

But I don't know what I think about anything anymore. And I don't know why she won't leave me alone now.

DEBRA

Maybe she's just checking in, making sure you're okay.

JENNIFER

Yeah, right.

DEBRA

I "talk" to her all the time.

JENNIFER

You do?

DEBRA

Yeah. Sometimes she gives good advice.

JENNIFER

But she gives me nothing.

DEBRA

She loved you, Jen.

JENNIFER

—

DEBRA

I know she did.

JENNIFER

Then why the impenetrable stare? Still. I can't get out from under it. It flattens me and I can't breathe // and I...

DEBRA

You know these are panic attacks, right?

JENNIFER

I guess.

DEBRA

You're a freakin' doctor, Jen. You guess? Are you getting help?

JENNIFER

I thought I was managing on my own.

DEBRA

You're not.

JENNIFER

I don't even know what I need. Or where to start. Everything's caving in.

DEBRA

Okay. I hear you. You feel like you're alone. But Lilia and I called you a million times last night.

JENNIFER

God, I didn't mean // to...

DEBRA

She was totally freaked out. She thought she'd somehow offended you.

JENNIFER

Shit. No, no, I // just...

DEBRA

She wanted to change her flight to stay, to make sure you were okay. I convinced her to go but only after she demanded that I promise, on Rose's memory, that I'd come check on you first thing.

JENNIFER

This is not how I // wanted...

DEBRA

You need help.

JENNIFER

I know. I mean, I'm sure you're right, but...

DEBRA

But what?

JENNIFER

She's been gone for three years. You'd think I'd feel completely free now.

DEBRA

It doesn't work that way. I still get sliced through when I least expect it, hearing her voice. "Better double check the amount of ginger!" or "You could do worse than that Mike."

JENNIFER

I miss her. How is that possible?

DEBRA

I miss her, too.

Long pause.

DEBRA (cont)

I think I know what you can do. A first baby step.

JENNIFER

Remove all the bottles of wine from the premises?

DEBRA

Yes. That. But something else, too. I'll show you if you want.

JENNIFER

Okay. If you have time. I don't // want to ...

DEBRA

I'll make the time.

JENNIFER

I understand if you don't // want to...

DEBRA

Aren't you the one who said it's just you and me now?

JENNIFER

Yeah.

DEBRA

We'll need a few things. Are you okay for me to leave?

JENNIFER

I think so.

DEBRA

Go back to sleep and we'll clean up when I get back. And turn your damn phone on, okay?

JENNIFER

Okay.

DEBRA

Less than an hour. You're sure you're okay for me to // leave?

JENNIFER

Yeah. Deb?

DEBRA

Yeah?

JENNIFER

Thanks.

DEBRA

Don't thank me yet.

JENNIFER watches DEBRA leave, then picks up the shattered mirror and stares through the empty frame.

SCENE 11

A hour later. DEBRA re-enters the apartment loaded down with shopping bags. The mess is cleaned up and JENNIFER is nowhere to be seen.

DEBRA

Jen? Jen!

*JENNIFER enters wearing clean clothes and a bandage on her foot.
Sound. ROSE, wearing her apron, enters unnoticed by her children.*

DEBRA (cont)

Why didn't you wait // for me...?

JENNIFER

I can never go back to sleep. Ever. It's like an alarm clock in my head but instead of some nice music it's mom's voice saying "Get up.

DEBRA & JENNIFER

You're wasting half the day."

JENNIFER

You, too?

DEBRA

In my case, she did have a point. Is your foot okay?

JENNIFER

The cut isn't deep. I can tweeze and butterfly bandage with the best of 'em. No sign of infection.

DEBRA

Good.

JENNIFER

I'm far more concerned about life-threatening levels of embarrassment.

DEBRA

Is "literal mortification" an actual diagnosis?

JENNIFER

Not dead yet, but you'll be the first to know.

They chuckle.

JENNIFER (cont)

What's all this?

DEBRA

You'll see.

JENNIFER

Can I help?

DEBRA

Make coffee.

JENNIFER

I see, build up my confidence with a small task first.

DEBRA

I hear you're stellar with a French press.

JENNIFER makes coffee. DEBRA continues to unpack. She puts a bouquet of roses in a vase. She finds some bowls and pots in the cupboards.

DEBRA (cont)

Okay, we're almost ready. I just need to double-check one thing in the recipe.

She pulls out an apron from her bag. It's swag from her book tour.

DEBRA (cont)

Put this on. Compliments of Hot House Rose. And if you haven't texted Lilia yet, do it now. Tell her I'm here with you and that you're feeling better today.

JENNIFER

What did you tell her?

DEBRA

I didn't know what to tell her but she knows you're a mess. And she loves you anyway.

JENNIFER sends a quick text.

DEBRA (cont)

She gave me these for you.

She pulls out two slim books from her bag.

One for you and one for Ruth. Full disclosure: I'm not a big poetry fan. I always feel dumb when I read it. But her poems make sense to me.

JENNIFER

You stayed after.

DEBRA

Yeah, she still wanted to go for dinner and I wasn't going to abandon her with those divine collards and cornbread.

JENNIFER

Thanks for going.

DEBRA

It was actually a total blast. She's fascinating. So smart, so funny. You were right about her. Right as usual. We're really lucky you found her.

JENNIFER

She probably already likes you more than me now.

DEBRA

Don't do that.

JENNIFER

I'm sorry.

DEBRA

It's not a competition. She's got plenty for both of us. And Ruth, too, when she's ready.

JENNIFER

You're right. I'm sorry.

DEBRA

You've been saying that a lot.

JENNIFER

I know, but I really am.

DEBRA

It's a good start.

She checks the recipe on her phone.

DEBRA (cont)

Okay, I was right, I bumped it up to 1 ½ tablespoons of the zest. I've been tweaking the recipe a bit.

JENNIFER

What're you making?

DEBRA

Not me. You.

She takes out a madeleines shell pan from one of the shopping bags.

JENNIFER

Oh. I don't think I can. Isn't it complicated?

DEBRA

I'll coach you through this first batch. Thank god for New York City where you can get matzah cake meal at the corner bodega.

JENNIFER

I noticed you didn't put this one in the book.

DEBRA

You did read the whole thing.

JENNIFER

Why didn't you?

DEBRA

Because despite your assumption that I'm a total mercenary, I didn't want to share this one. It belongs to us. I'm pretty sure mom would have wanted it that way.

JENNIFER

You don't think she would have cared that you published all the others?

DEBRA

Oh most definitely, but she doesn't get to boss me around anymore. And you're right, there's no denying she was quite proprietary. She'd do this thing, when someone would ask her for a recipe, she'd be all fake sweet and say "sure, sure, I'd love to share," and then she'd write it out long hand on a card, and leave out one important ingredient or change the measurements just enough so that they'd never be able to make them as good as hers.

JENNIFER

Classic Rose. She was funny in her own way.

DEBRA

Yeah, she was.

Okay. Enough stalling.

DEBRA (cont)

Two eggs. Room temperature. It's important that they're not cold. Beat slightly. And measure out $\frac{1}{4}$ cup into here.

Good. Now beat in 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon of the cake meal.

JENNIFER

Does the extra tablespoon matter?

DEBRA

Yes! Baking is science, doctor. It's all about precision. And $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar plus two tablespoons of orange-blossom honey. The honey's not in the original recipe but I like how it adds a layer of flavor.

JENNIFER

What would mom say?

DEBRA

She wasn't as "by the book" as you'd think. She made experiments all the time. Like a $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of black pepper in her spice cookies. Or mayonnaise in the banana rum coconut drops.

Keep beating. It's a little dry. Add one more tablespoon of the egg. Yeah, that looks better. That has to rest while we start the butter. 10 tablespoons over medium-high heat.

JENNIFER

More than a whole stick of butter?

DEBRA

It's all about the butter. Why do you think they taste so good? You heat it til it foams to brown it, but you don't want to burn it, so you have to keep stirring and watching. Once we get the batter together it has to cool in the fridge. To get the big bump when they bake, the batter has to be cold and the oven hot.

They drink coffee. DEBRA watches JENNIFER who is concentrating very hard on stirring.

DEBRA

You can take a breath, you know.

JENNIFER

It's turning brown, I think.

DEBRA

Another few seconds. Okay, good. Take it off. See those darker bits, that's what you want. Let that cool for a minute. Now measure a tablespoon of the cake meal and mix it with a tablespoon and a half of the butter. Make sure it's smooth. Now, we paint.

She dips a pastry brush into the butter and starts painting the scalloped shell pan.

JENNIFER

You only did this with mom that one time?

DEBRA

Yep.

JENNIFER

But you've got it memorized.

DEBRA

I make them all the time. I like that they require so much attention. My hands, my eyes, the moment when the melting butter smells just right. The measuring, the stirring, the waiting for things to rest. These damn French tea cakes taught me how to be patient. And they never come out exactly the same, so I'm always making little changes.

JENNIFER

Doesn't that drive you nuts?

DEBRA

What?

JENNIFER

That they're so unpredictable.

DEBRA

Yeah, but it's humbling. They knock down any remaining illusion of the possibility of perfection. One batch at a time.

JENNIFER

You couldn't start me out with something easier?

DEBRA

Why would I do that? You've always been an overachiever.

JENNIFER

But I like oatmeal raisin, too. Those are much simpler, aren't they?

DEBRA

These aren't just for you.

JENNIFER

Oh. Then why?

DEBRA

Mom was never good at talking about how she felt, right?

JENNIFER

Unless she was disappointed or mad.

DEBRA

But think about it. She never said those things. She went silent and right back to work. She didn't talk, she baked. She filled the cookie jar. When we left, she sent us packages. Maybe it was butterscotch snowflakes for "great job I'm proud of you." Or double-fudge walnut for "call me I miss you."

JENNIFER

Or madeleines for "I'm sad and I'm sorry"?

DEBRA

Yeah. I think so. We'll make three batches today. I don't know how well they'll keep on the way to Buenos Aires, but overnight to Boulder will be just fine.

JENNIFER

And the third?

DEBRA

For us. For all the sisters. Lost and found.

Beat.

JENNIFER

What's next?

DEBRA

I was thinking you should come home for Seder and stay for a week, or two if you want. I was planning to do something low-key, just with Mike and his parents. Let me tell you kosher grape juice is top shelf compared to Manischewitz. (*teasing*) And, as you know, I've gotten very good at taking care of old people.

JENNIFER

I meant what's the next step in the recipe.

DEBRA

I knew what you meant. But will you think about it?

JENNIFER

Okay.

DEBRA

You don't need to do this alone. I don't think you should.

JENNIFER

Okay.

DEBRA

Good. Now zest the lemon while the butter finishes cooling. We'll need the full tablespoon and a half for the best flavor and color. I'll help you.

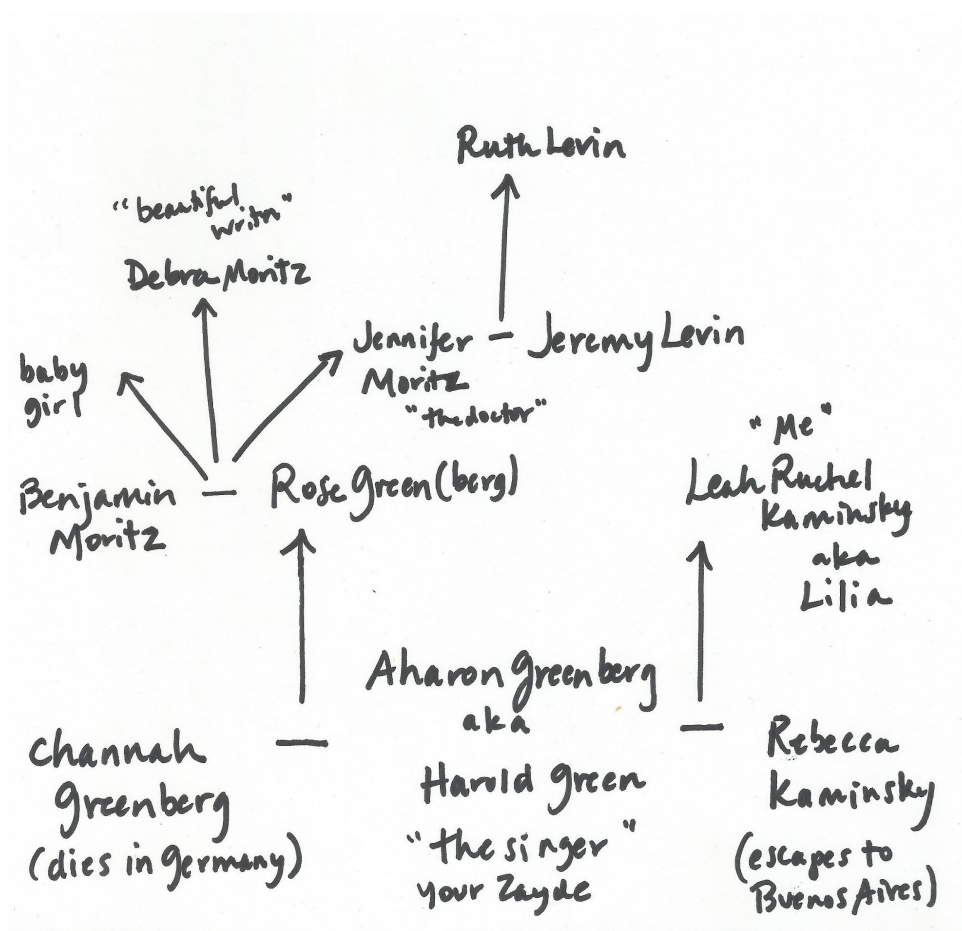
She grabs two lemons and tosses one to JENNIFER. They both stop to smell the fruit.

As they grate, DEBRA begins to hum Bei Mir Bistu Sheyn. JENNIFER joins her.

The smell of cookies returns to fill the space. ROSE watches her girls for a moment, takes off her apron, leaves it on the counter, then disappears.

End of play.

Green-Moritz Family Tree as created by Lilia Kaminsky



Timeline for Scene 4 (the 2.5 years after Rose's death)

Section 1: 6 months after Rose's death - fall

Debra creates finishes book proposal

Ruth has been in out-patient recovery over the summer and went back to school even though she's still having problems; she overdoses and moves to in-patient recovery

Jennifer and Jeremy are fighting, Jeremy is rarely home now

Jennifer is drinking more and more, begins missing classes

Section 2: 1 year after - early April

Debra observes yahrzeit, her book has sold, she finds the immigration docs and sends them to Jennifer

Ruth has moved to a second in-patient recovery facility, Jeremy has moved out

Jennifer gets a warning from her dean; she's spending time on genealogy sites on her okay days; she receives the documents from Debra and starts photographing them

Section 3: 1.25 years after - summer

Debra sends Jennifer the manuscript for review

Ruth is still in recovery program

Jennifer receives manuscript but doesn't open the envelope

Section 4: 2 years after - early April

Debra is in final edits for the book, she's making madeleines and observing the yahrzeit

Jennifer finally opens the manuscript and reads it; she's forced to take a "medical leave" from teaching; she rarely leaves the house

Section 5: 2.25 years after - summer

Debra is waiting for the book to be published, she's busy with the business and her relationship with Mike

Ruth has started refusing to speak to Jennifer; more fighting with Jeremy

Jennifer hits bottom - calls Debra

Section 6: 2.5 years after - September

Debra's book comes out and she starts a tour; Mike proposes

Jennifer digs even more deeply into genealogy - her obsession/refuge; she discovers Lilia's post. She pulls herself together enough to call Lilia.