

SEARCHING FOR A NEW SUNRISE

By
Robin Rice

*When darkness threatens to engulf the future, should one pull
aside the curtain and chance being blinded by the light?*

SEARCHING FOR A NEW SUNRISE

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SEARCHING FOR A NEW SUNRISE

SEARCHING FOR A NEW SUNRISE was written with input from Intimate Relations Project of OneHeart Productions in New York City (Mario Golden, Andreas Roberts). This involved workshops with five women, descendants of Holocaust survivors. Knowledge gained from these workshops, films, books, lectures, readings with Manhattan Oracles and personal experience as the wife of a Holocaust survivor - all this went into the writing of the play.

Nancy Ferragallo choreographed movement sequences in a reading at the Segal Center in New York City. The play also received a reading at The English Theatre in Berlin.

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CHARACTERS*

RUTH STEINBERG - 79. Jewish. Polish. Blind. Holocaust survivor. Keeps her pain to herself in order to shield her granddaughter.

RACHEL-ALMA ROSEN - 35. New Yorker. Jewish. Ruth's granddaughter. Needs to know about her family's past in order to heal her own life.

HELEN GOLDEN - 18. From Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Jewish. Wants to appear to be successfully independent.

ESTHER COHEN - 30. From Flatbush, Brooklyn. Jewish. Wants to appear to be a perfect housewife and mother.

DEBORAH WEISS - 40. From New York's Upper East Side. Jewish. Wants to appear to have all she desires.

*Sometimes all, sometimes one or a few characters, comprise a chorus to observe, nudge, interpret and/or echo emotions, thoughts, circumstances. Chorus voices are like instruments in an orchestra, not individuals.

SETTING

New York City. October 18, 2012

Shifts blend into one another or overlap. No distinct exits or entrances. No one completely leaves. The space is open. Interiors and exteriors flow together. Choreographed Sequences are movements created by a director or choreographer. They form a heightened reality. They are perhaps simple, not necessarily "classic" dance. Descriptions of Choreographed Sequences in the script are clues about the playwright's vision. They may be changed. The music may also be changed.

Transition - change of direction or beat for clarity.

See NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT following the script for a glossary and historical background.

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PROLOGUE - CHOREOGRAPHED SEQUENCE I

SOUND: Music -- Funeral March from Wagner's "Siegfried." As the audience enters the characters are in a tableau in an open space, each bound with a long strip of white cloth. RACHEL-ALMA wears a slip, no shoes. Her throat is bound. DEBORAH wears heels, an expensive outfit that shows off her figure, a bold, jeweled necklace. Her heart is bound. ESTHER wears an apron over modest clothes and flats. Her legs are bound. HELEN wears jeans and a tee-shirt with a famous woman artist's picture (perhaps Frida Kahlo). Her wrist is bound. RUTH wears a long, dark dress and shawl. She is bound to an old, battered suitcase. Simple, eloquent movements define the theme of the play. Then:

RUTH. Tight as a noose they've got us. Stripped, gnashed, unthreaded as the last dream you can't remember. That ache in your arms, it's from tearing at untearable ties.

PART I. NEEDING TO KNOW

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen) hums one note as Rachel-Alma guides Ruth, who is blind, to a chair in their small apartment. Ruth won't let Rachel-Alma carry the suitcase. On a table beside the chair is a cup of tea. On the windowsill are pots of various herbs. On the floor near the window are a small watering can, a few wide-mouthed glass jars, an open bag of potting soil, a box of pebbles, liquid plant fertilizer, tools for potting, rooting, and caring for houseplants. Humming fades

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out. Early on October 18. Ruth sips the tea. She has not let go of the suitcase.

RACHEL-ALMA. What did you take? Was it snowing? Did you have a warm coat?

RUTH. Feh! Lipton!

RACHEL-ALMA. Did you work for them? You were young. You could have -- (*Ruth crosses to the potted plants, taking the suitcase, feeling her way.*) I need to know.

RUTH. Suddenly today you are a broken record?

RACHEL-ALMA. I need to know today. Tell me today, Bubbie, today.

RUTH. This day, heavy with bad omens. This day of all days. I will not let you take my mind there.

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen). October 18.

RUTH. Eighteen. *Chai.* Life? A cruel joke.

RACHEL-ALMA. Sherlock Holmes said: "A person becomes the history of his own family."

RUTH. History will not make you strong, Rachela.

RACHEL-ALMA. Knowing who I'm descended from will.

RUTH. From me.

RACHEL-ALMA. Who else?

RUTH. Don't blame the family for what you lack.

RACHEL-ALMA. Names, descriptions, photographs --

RUTH. If everybody who didn't know their family history whined about it like a sick goat -- sick goats are very whiney for your information -- if everybody used that for an excuse what a mess the world would be.

RACHEL-ALMA. I don't want it to matter. I don't want to be like this.

RUTH. I bet Mr. Wet Wool Jacket in 3-B doesn't know details of his ancestors in India. Does he blame how he is on that? When my eyes were good I would see him through the window of Remir's Barber Shop, sweeping up. Sweeping other people's coats --

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RACHEL-ALMA. Hair.

RUTH. Sweeping hair from the floor and him a grown man. Does he whine? No, he wears his jacket to work -- such as it is -- he wears it and keeps his chin up.

RACHEL-ALMA. I've tried to let it go. I didn't ask while Mom was alive. But now she's gone and time's running out. You're --

RUTH. (*Interrupting.*) Old but hale as a horse.

RACHEL-ALMA. I know it was beyond awful. I know you miss them terribly. I know you want to forget. But I need --

RUTH. Enough. (*Ruth pinches off a dead leaf. She works lovingly on the plants, watering, cutting off a stem to root it in water in a glass jar. Rachel-Alma unhappily turns to finish hemming a second-hand dress.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. God I need a cigarette.

RUTH. No cooking up one of your plans.

CHORUS (Deborah). Rachel-Alma, wanting a tree to hold her, wanting to see the sun go down on this day.

RACHEL-ALMA. No. Rise.

CHORUS (Deborah). Rise.

CHORUS (Helen). Ask again.

CHORUS (Esther). Insist.

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen). Tell me about those who were murdered.

RACHEL-ALMA. Bubbie?

RUTH. Listen to the wind. It has blown the trees bare, no? (*No reply.*)

Now you are not talking to me?

RACHEL-ALMA. The ginkgos still have their leaves. They're bright yellow.

RUTH. Stubborn little ginkgo leaves.

RACHEL-ALMA. The sky over the bridge was black when I came in.

RUTH. A storm. I smell it.

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RACHEL-ALMA. I'm sorry I got Lipton. I didn't notice 'til I got to the register.

RUTH. So you say: "My grandmother likes orange spice tea. One minute. I'll be right back."

RACHEL-ALMA. People were waiting.

RUTH. It was your turn.

RACHEL-ALMA. The cashier would have chewed me out.

RUTH. Stick up for yourself! Grow a spine! Elsewise cowardice will sniggle in and eat your *rachenmandel*.

RACHEL-ALMA. You cornered the hero market in this family. (*No reply.*) I shouldn't have said that. (*No reply.*) Try to forget it.

RUTH. Please God make this day be over.

RACHEL-ALMA. We'll light candles tonight. We'll say *kaddish*. (*Rachel-Alma puts on the dress to see if it's the right length. Transition.*) Can we practice interviewing?

RUTH. You got one?

RACHEL-ALMA. Yes.

RUTH. When?

RACHEL-ALMA. Soon.

RUTH. For a good job?

RACHEL-ALMA. Heck of a lot better than what I have.

RUTH. Interview with a man?

RACHEL-ALMA. Yes.

RUTH. Afraid he will throw you a "curved ball"?

RACHEL-ALMA. Let's rehearse. You be him. Mr. Cooper.

RUTH. Cooperstein?

RACHEL-ALMA. Cooper.

RUTH. Is he married?

RACHEL-ALMA. Who knows.

RUTH. Call. Find out.

RACHEL-ALMA. Can't. Phone's cut off.

RUTH. His?

RACHEL-ALMA. Ours.

RUTH. Since when?

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RACHEL-ALMA. Last month. I overpaid.

RUTH. No jokes. Not on this day. Go to the deli and call.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's closed. Some punk shot old Mr. Nuñez in the foot Tuesday night.

RUTH. Is it close by, the job?

RACHEL-ALMA. Wherever they need me. Let's practice.

RUTH. Okay. We are in Cooperstein's hat.

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Gently correcting.*) Store.

RUTH. Store.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's not actually his store.

RUTH. You should interview with the top banana.

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Joking.*) Mr. Barnes-and-Noble was busy.

RUTH. (*Excited.*) A book store?

RACHEL-ALMA. Yes.

RUTH. Why didn't you say? My God! You will get the job. You will impress the pants off Cooperstein. (*Clears her throat.*) Ready?

RACHEL-ALMA. Ready.

RUTH. Knock at the door. (*Rachel-Alma knocks.*) Shoulders back. Chin up. Walk through the door strong. (*Rachel-Alma is extremely nervous, even for this pretend interview. She steps tentatively forward.*) Are you walking?

RACHEL-ALMA. I'm walking.

RUTH. That's not walking. Pick up your feet.

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). Rachel-Alma tilting. (*Rachel-Alma grabs the back of a chair for balance.*)

CHORUS (Deborah). Slipping.

CHORUS (Helen). Sliding.

CHORUS (Esther). Needing.

CHORUS (Helen). Sliding.

CHORUS (Esther). Needing.

RACHEL-ALMA. One name.

RUTH. The interview. Focus.

RACHEL-ALMA. First name, last name, anything.

RUTH. Tell him your name.

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RACHEL-ALMA. Tell me theirs.

RUTH. Don't think on that.

RACHEL-ALMA. Something to hold onto!

RUTH. Separate your mind from that.

RACHEL-ALMA. Please. Bubbie.

RUTH. Let the past heal over like the scars that were my eyes.

(No reply.) We try again.

RACHEL-ALMA. I can't do it if you won't give me at least one name.

RUTH. Try, Rachela. *(Rachel-Alma sits, gathers herself, then.)*

RACHEL-ALMA. Okay.

RUTH. Okay?

RACHEL-ALMA. Okay. Again.

RUTH. *(As Cooper.)* So, young lady, who are you?

RACHEL-ALMA. I have an appointment.

RUTH. *(As Cooper.)* Yes, yes, snap to it. I am a busy man.

RACHEL-ALMA. That's why you need me.

RUTH. Spot on! The job is in the bag!

RACHEL-ALMA. He'll ask about experience.

RUTH. Nobody knows books like you.

RACHEL-ALMA. But --

RUTH. What will you wear? A dress? Wear a dress. *(Ruth can't see Rachel-Alma has the dress on already.)* First impressions are everything. People take one look -- ah! There is a Jew. Ah ha!

RACHEL-ALMA. I'm not applying for a job with the Christian Coalition.

RUTH. People judge.

RACHEL-ALMA. Not everyone.

RUTH. You never know. You must be prepared.

RACHEL-ALMA. I'll wear one of Mom's dresses.

RUTH. Not too long?

RACHEL-ALMA. I fixed the hem.

RUTH. Not too short?

RACHEL-ALMA. Give me some credit.

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RUTH. Make sure. Try it on.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's on.

RUTH. Check for *schmutz*.

RACHEL-ALMA. I did.

RUTH. Better -- bring him here. I will tell him my granddaughter is *magna cum laude* from CCNY and that's not chopped liver. Done. Over. You are hired. What is that smell?

RACHEL-ALMA. The storm.

RUTH. Something more.

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Joking.*) Thunderfoot upstairs burning eggs again?

RUTH. Worse.

RACHEL-ALMA. Wet Wool Jacket? Him and his curry?

RUTH. Worse.

RACHEL-ALMA. Dog poop by the stoop?

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). Worse!

RUTH. It's terrible!

CHORUS (Helen). From under the door?

RUTH. Is the door closed?

CHORUS (Deborah). The window?

RUTH. Is the window closed?

RACHEL-ALMA. Everything's closed and locked. It's nothing, Bubbie. There's really nothing. (*Transition. Rachel-Alma soothes Ruth, smoothing her back. But a new fear arises in Ruth.*)

RUTH. Where is this new job?

RACHEL-ALMA. I told you. Wherever they need me. Not far.

RUTH. Off the bridge?

RACHEL-ALMA. Not off. Over.

RUTH. In New Jersey?

RACHEL-ALMA. Beggars can't be --

RUTH. (*Interrupting.*) Forget it. You have a job.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's part time. It pays shit.

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RUTH. (*Calls.*) Ella! Rachel-Alma is leaving! Me with a pain like a knife in the heart and your daughter goes off the bridge to New Jersey!

RACHEL-ALMA. Mom's not here, Bubbie.

RUTH. Ella!

RACHEL-ALMA. Not for five years.

CHORUS (Deborah, Helen, Esther). Five years today.

RACHEL-ALMA. Don't you remember?

CHORUS (Deborah, Helen, Esther). Ruth remembers. Five years -- 60 years -- she remembers too much. (*Ruth rocks. Rachel-Alma holds her. Chorus recites a Hebrew prayer to say in case of danger.*)

CHORUS (Deborah, Helen, Esther). *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, ha-gomel lahayavim tovot sheg'malani kol tov.*

RUTH. This particular day you know.

RACHEL-ALMA. I know.

RUTH. I tend my plants. Root new plants. Oregano, thyme, cinnamon basil, catnip... We have no cat, but I bring a new plant to life. It is not a literary metaphor -- that's your department. My plants bring a small pleasure to what is left. I care for them as if they were children, but I have no child. Not anymore. You, dear granddaughter, only you. People don't rise from the dead by sticking them in water with a pinch of filing cabinet.

RACHEL-ALMA. Root hormone.

RUTH. ...a pinch of root hormone powder. People don't grow new roots. What we have is what we have. When it is gone, it is gone. (*A moment. Ruth hugs the suitcase close.*) Light is needed for growing, but I am a shadow. A shadow that has fallen over them who are gone, we who were there, our children, our children's children. I am a ghost, haunting myself. (*Rachel-Alma puts Ruth's shawl over her shoulders.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. You're safe, Bubbie. Nobody is going to hurt you. I'll get through the interview. I'll get the job. It's good

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pay. We'll have no more worries. Before you know it I'll be able to open Rachel-Alma's Dream.

RUTH. Over bodegaville across the street?

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Laughs.*) Maybe.

RUTH. A reading area with soft chairs, eh?

RACHEL-ALMA. Soft chairs.

RUTH. Soft lights.

RACHEL-ALMA. Soft music.

RUTH. No music. It kills the mood.

RACHEL-ALMA. No music.

RUTH. Plants in the window.

RACHEL-ALMA. Plants.

RUTH. A window box filled with lavender.

RACHEL-ALMA. Shelves to the ceiling filled with books.

RUTH. Used books only. The older books are, the more they're read, the better they get.

RACHEL-ALMA. Rachel-Alma's Dream will specialize in plays, poetry aaannnddd...

RUTH. Aaaannndddd...

RACHEL-ALMA + RUTH. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle!

(*Rachel-Alma takes Ruth's hands in hers.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. But characterization of Holmes is weak.

RUTH. Since when?

RACHEL-ALMA. Conon Doyle generalized.

RUTH. He's the best.

RACHEL-ALMA. Huge chunks of who Holmes is are missing. He wouldn't be able to cope with a non-fiction life.

RUTH. You are not Sherlock Holmes.

RACHEL-ALMA. "Little things are infinitely important" to him.

RUTH. You are not him, Rachel-Alma.

RACHEL-ALMA. Give me a crumb.

RUTH. (*Pulling her hands away.*) Forget this.

RACHEL-ALMA. The interview is tomorrow.

RUTH. So soon?

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RACHEL-ALMA. I didn't schedule it. I can't change it. My name's on a list.

RUTH. (*Extremely upset.*) Never wear a Star of David. Never get in a line going you don't know where. Never never have your name on a list!

RACHEL-ALMA. I'd feel confident if you would --

RUTH. NO. (*No reply.*) Our family tree was chopped down by Nazi bastards. Its leaves are dust. Its limbs dead. Its roots shriveled. It won't support you. You are on your own.

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Starts having an attack.*) I can't...

RUTH. No names. No interview if you can't do it. No.

RACHEL-ALMA. ...can't breathe... (*Rachel-Alma is dizzy.*)

CHORUS (Deborah). Shoes!

CHORUS (Helen). Scuffed!

CHORUS (Deborah). Nails!

CHORUS (Helen). Jagged!

CHORUS (Esther). Button!

CHORUS (Helen). Missing!

CHORUS (Deborah). Self!

CHORUS (Helen). Shriveled! (*Chorus hums one note. Ruth hears Rachel-Alma fall to her knees. Humming becomes Rachel-Alma's.*)

RUTH. What was that? Rachela?

CHORUS (Esther). Rachel-Alma, gasping for breath.

CHORUS (Deborah). Searching.

CHORUS (Helen). For a branch.

CHORUS (Esther). A twig.

CHORUS (Deborah). A leaf.

CHORUS (Helen). Barren.

CHORUS (Esther). Tipping.

CHORUS (Deborah). Black.

CHORUS (Helen). Ice.

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen). Skidding, falling...

CHORUS (Deborah). October 18.

CHORUS (Esther). *Cheshvan* 1, 5705..

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CHORUS (Helen). Mother gone.

CHORUS (Deborah). Father. Grandfather.

CHORUS (Esther). Aunts. Uncles.

CHORUS (Deborah). Cousins.

CHORUS (Deborah, Helen, Esther). Gone.

CHORUS (Helen). Mind of grief. Air of omen.

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen). Who is she? (*Rachel-Alma hums and hums.*)

RUTH. Did you fall down?

CHORUS (Deborah). Going to a blank place.

CHORUS (Esther, Deborah, Helen). Going.

RUTH. Rachela?

CHORUS (Helen). Ears dark.

CHORUS (Deborah). Eyes dark.

RUTH. Rachela!

CHORUS (Esther). Under.

CHORUS (Helen). Going.

CHORUS (Helen, Esther, Deborah). Under.

CHORUS (Deborah). Up for air. (*Rachel-Alma gasps.*)

RUTH. Where are you?!

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). Blank. (*Rachel-Alma's mind is blank. She never had an attack this serious. Ruth feels her way to Rachel-Alma, holds her.*)

CHORUS (Helen). I swallowed my hurt.

CHORUS (Deborah). I swallowed my heart.

CHORUS (Esther). I swallowed my whole self.

CHORUS (Esther, Deborah, Helen). Blank.

SHIFT

Late afternoon. Brooklyn. SOUND: instrumental music, a lively beat on a Jewish radio station (WMDI-LP [107.9 FM, Lakewood, NJ, perhaps]). In her kitchen, Esther vigorously stirs cake batter. She is preparing an elaborate supper of Jewish

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delicacies from scratch. She swings her hips, works in time to the music, making up a little poem.

ESTHER. Kosher pizza, brisket meat,
Fried *pierogi* -- there's a treat;
Kishke, knaidlach, kasha knish,
Kreplach swimming like a fish! (*A moment.*) No boxed
Pepperidge Farm stuffing mix for my family. No, siree!
Ancestral recipes from scratch. Every teaspoon. Every cup. Extra
special today. Extra perfect. A little tense. A little on edge.
Kohlrabi! I forgot kohlrabi! "It's not about kohlrabi, *mamelah.*
It's about honoring the ancestors, keeping the chain strong. The
recipe chain of command." Yes, Mama! Yes, siree! (*Again, in
time to music, making up the poem as she goes.*)
Tender chicken, poppy cake,
Simmer, saute, stir and bake;
Schmaltz abundant, pudding sweet,
Honeyed tzimmes -- eat, eat, eat!

SHIFT

*Continuing. Ruth holds a dazed Rachel-Alma. Rachel-Alma
groans.*

RUTH. Thank God!

RACHEL-ALMA. Everything went black.

RUTH. Do you have pain?

RACHEL-ALMA. No.

RUTH. Can you move your arms? Can you smile straight? Let
me feel.

RACHEL-ALMA. Did I have a stroke?

RUTH. Nobody in the family ever had a stroke or a heart
attack.

RACHEL-ALMA. Did one of the ancestors -- ?

RUTH. You suffer lack of confidence. Nothing else.

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RACHEL-ALMA. (*Rhetorical.*) Is that inherited?

RUTH. You are stubborn up the wazoo!

RACHEL-ALMA. How I am isn't normal.

RUTH. An interview tomorrow for in New Jersey -- no wonder, my God! *Farklemt.* Afraid. Anybody would be. Change the day to next week. Make it for a store close by.

RACHEL-ALMA. They only have the one store.

RUTH. You will apply to a different bookstore. One in the city. We will practice and practice. You will do fine.

RACHEL-ALMA. I'll still need the connection.

RUTH. This never happened before. It will not happen again.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's getting worse.

CHORUS (Esther, Deborah, Helen). For the first time Rachel says it out loud, she says --

RACHEL-ALMA. Something is seriously wrong with me, Bubbie.

RUTH. The pain is mine. All mine. (*Rachel-Alma struggles to her feet.*)

CHORUS (Esther). Rachel's heart pounding.

CHORUS (Helen). Hands of ice.

CHORUS (Deborah). Shaking.

RACHEL-ALMA. I love you. I wouldn't ask if there was another way. (*Pause.*) Were any of my ancestors insane?

RUTH. Never.

RACHEL-ALMA. Am I going to end up like Mom?

RUTH. There are zero *mishuggah* genes in our blood. Not one of us needed headshrinker *schmucks* like some families. Us Steinbergs -- sane as cows. Cows are very sane, in case you didn't know. Enough *cockamamie* --

RACHEL-ALMA. (*Interrupting.*) Tell me.

RUTH. No.

RACHEL-ALMA. You're killing me!

RUTH. (*Oh so serious.*) You do not know from killing.

RACHEL-ALMA. My mother --

RUTH. (*Interrupting:*) Stop.

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RACHEL-ALMA. I have a right. (*Pause.*) Their blood is mine too.

RUTH. Blood. Oh yes.

RACHEL-ALMA. I have a right to know. (*A long, long pause.*)

RUTH. You will be satisfied with one memory? (*Rachel-Alma kisses Ruth's cheek in thanks. A long moment, then.*) My Benjamin. Your *zaidch*. The early part I can turn over in my mind like a butterscotch. Later is too painful.

RACHEL-ALMA. Early is good.

RUTH. I first saw him kicking a stone down an alley, hands in his pockets, whistling into the wind. I thought: there is the finest looking young man in all of Europe!

RACHEL-ALMA. What did he look like?

RUTH. Dark eyes. Black hair. Long legs. Ears a little sticking out for to give character -- so. He said I was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen, and there were a lot of beautiful girls in the Lodz ghetto. After, I was not so much.

RACHEL-ALMA. You're still beautiful. He'd still think so.

RUTH. Every day the sun is low. The shadow longer. When all who were there are gone, perhaps then the sun will rise; the shadow will shrink; it will be daylight again.

RACHEL-ALMA. Did they take you both from the ghetto straight to Auschwitz?

RUTH. We had plans to push aside the shadow. To tear a hole in the sky, push it out to the dark, and quick, close the tear. I thought we would go on together. (*Pause.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. Don't stop. (*Ruth shakes her head. She is drained.*) We can do it. You and me. We can push the shadow aside.

RUTH. You're an intelligent young woman. A bit lacking in confidence. A bit avoiding confrontation. You'll grow out of it. Liver for dinner. That's what you need.

RACHEL-ALMA. Bubbie --

RUTH. Liver and cod liver oil twice a day.

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RACHEL-ALMA. What will you do if something happens to me?

RUTH. *Luze zein shah! Kvetch, kvetch, kvetch* like a donkey.

RACHEL-ALMA. I won't give up.

RUTH. Period. End of story. (*Rachel-Alma brushes her hair, puts on shoes.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. The interview is at 10 tomorrow morning. I'll be damned if I chicken out because I'm too afraid I'll make a fool of myself stuttering or shaking or passing out. If you won't give me what I need, somebody else will. (*Rachel-Alma finds a pad of yellow paper and a marker. She writes furiously, creating a flyer. Ruth can hear the marker writing.*)

RUTH. Now what? Another letter to *Yad Vashem*? To the Tracing Service? The Red Cross? Books, letters... The bus to Washington to the museum to search. The Survivor Registry, money for phone calls? (*Rachel-Alma is lettering the flyer.*)
That bad spell --

RACHEL-ALMA. Hell of a lot worse than "bad."

RUTH. It was a warning to stop this search for your ancestors.

RACHEL-ALMA. Goddamnit!

RUTH. If I wasn't here to remind you, you would let it go.

RACHEL-ALMA. You have the heart to threaten... ?

CHORUS (Esther). Don't do it, Rachel.

CHORUS (Helen). Don't make a secret you'll regret.

RACHEL-ALMA. Is that what you said to Mom? Is that why she --

CHORUS (Esther, Deborah, Helen). Too late.

RUTH. I told her only the date. You see, even that was too much.

CHORUS (Esther). Rachel-Alma, avoiding her grandmother's sightless eyes.

CHORUS (Deborah). Letting it fester.

CHORUS (Helen). Letting Ruth blame herself. (*Transition.*)

RUTH. Make a fresh pot of tea. Lipton bags are fine. Is there *kugel*? A *nosh* you feel better, eh? Call Cooperstein. Ask him to

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come for tea and *kugel*. I will tell him you are 100 per cent from a family with no crazy people and no people in New Jersey, eh? I will send him to buy some nice liver for supper. You will not go out again today. You will stay with me. (*Rachel-Alma steps back, examines the flyer, smiles with satisfaction.*)

PART II. HELP!

Early evening. A bar in Greenwich Village. Deborah has a martini. She is smiling a practiced fake smile on the outside as usual. She talks to the unseen bartender.

DEBORAH. I get the bottle of Tanqueray out of the freezer and have a good stiff drink. (*Helen enters with her sketchbook and a stack of yellow copies of the flyer Rachel-Alma made.*) I go back in the bedroom and turn on the light. Richard, I say, Richard I faked that orgasm. Are you awake? I heard you, he says. Then nothing. I turn off the light and get back in bed. He pretends to go to sleep. I do too. In the morning he leaves for a conference in Miami. (*A sip of her drink, then to bartender.*) If he loves me why doesn't he know my orgasms aren't real? (*Pause. Then to bartender.*) Chocolate increases endorphins.

Makes love more accessible. Do you have any chocolate?

HELEN. I do. (*Helen puts a handful of Hershey kisses on the bar.*)

DEBORAH. (*A quick fake smile.*) No thank you.

HELEN. Hershey kisses. I have more.

DEBORAH. (*A bigger fake smile.*) No thank you.

HELEN. Want a flier? (*Deborah glares while fake smiling at Helen, then turns away.*) Wow.

DEBORAH. Now what?

HELEN. (*Admiring.*) Your necklace. (*Deborah's fake smile becomes real, though she doesn't turn to Helen yet.*) Are those diamonds?

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DEBORAH. Tanzanite. From Africa. Very much in demand these days.

HELEN. The blue is like a David Hockney swimming pool.

DEBORAH. It's my signature design.

HELEN. Yours?

DEBORAH. Deborah Weiss Designs.

HELEN. Wow. Where'd you learn to make jewelry?

DEBORAH. (*Still not facing Helen.*) The Rhode Island School of Design.

HELEN. Like what kind of classes?

DEBORAH. They loved me at Risdi.

HELEN. Like using metal and color?

DEBORAH. Naturally.

HELEN. I'm an artist too. I've got my sketchbook. Wanna see? (*Helen holds the sketchbook out, almost touching Deborah.*)

DEBORAH. (*Jumping back.*) Watch it! (*The fake smile again.*) Don't touch the dress. It's a Cucinelli.

HELEN. Oh.

DEBORAH. Brunello Cucinelli.

HELEN. Okay. (*Deborah and her fake smile turn away. Helen persists.*) I'm from New Jersey. I'm in New York 'cause last night my boyfriend forgot our date. I'm sitting by myself in a booth in TGI-Fridays on Route 4 and have to admit he doesn't really like me except for sex. Well not sex sex, but close. So, I'm sitting in TGI-Fridays alone. I eat a bowl of Gourmet Mac-and-Five-Cheeses, onion rings, a pile of pot-stickers and a Brownie Obsession. Then I go in the ladies room and barf. Then I sit in the booth picturing him in the ice in the glass of Coke and he morphs into David. You know, David in the painting "David and Goliath" by Caravaggio. David is really --

DEBORAH. (*To herself.*) Hot.

HELEN. Yeah. Then, I'm staring at the ice and David morphs into a satyr. Satyrs are nasty. My boyfriend isn't exactly nasty. Yes he is. He's nasty. My life in New Jersey is nasty. You're like a Renaissance painting of Virgin Mary.

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DEBORAH. *(Turning to face Helen.)* Excuse me?

HELEN. How she looks at baby Jesus on her lap. With love.

DEBORAH. I'm Jewish.

HELEN. Me too, but I love baby Jesus paintings. They've got this book: "How to Love for Dummies." I thought I'd get it and put it in Nasty's gym locker.

DEBORAH. It's useless.

HELEN. You read it? *(Deborah pops a Hershey kiss in her mouth.)*

DEBORAH. No.

HELEN. Dr. Phil says "Open your soul to all-encompassing love."

DEBORAH. He's a fake doctor.

HELEN. Love has nothing to do with orgasms.

DEBORAH. Where'd you get that gem? Wikipedia?

(Transition.)

HELEN. So I'm sitting in TGI-Fridays bummed and nauseous and I realize -- duh! -- Nasty Boyfriend and Mother have been making my life go where they want it to go and not where I want it to go. My own mother! Hello? My friends are at like Brown and Harvard and I'm in Fair Lawn, going to Ramapo College of New Jersey so she can make me live at home. I decide then and there to make my own path to my own future. I walk right out of TGI-Fridays and catch a bus to New York City and nap in Port Authority Bus Station on a bench between a guy spitting on the floor and a girl with sores on her face.

DEBORAH. I avoid Port Authority.

HELEN. It's like wall-to-wall Goya. Beat down and turned around waifs and beggars.

DEBORAH. Spare me.

HELEN. I like it. I'm interested in suffering. This guy Theo says "yo, hey" so I crash with him and some kids in a building that's gonna be torn down. The toilets don't work. Theo's a freegan.

DEBORAH. Freakin what?

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HELEN. Free-gan. He lives on free stuff. Like off the land, only in the city. He dumpster dives.

DEBORAH. Don't touch me!

HELEN. I was reaching for the pretzels. (*Transition.*) I bet your home's not like a morgue. I bet you don't have photos of dead people on every level surface. My parents are dead too. Especially my mother. Not really, but she acts like it. My big brother moved to California. What are you doing drinking in a bar by yourself ?

DEBORAH. Minding my own business.

HELEN. I think you're thinking about love.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma, Ruth, Esther) (*A sound:*) Swoosh!

DEBORAH. What was that?

HELEN. I said "love" and --

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma, Ruth, Esther). (*A sound.*)

SWOOSH!

HELEN. It didn't happen before.

DEBORAH. Don't say it again.

HELEN. I know what it is. I'm thinking about you-know-what and you're thinking about it --

DEBORAH. I am not.

HELEN. ...plus a huge lot of other people are thinking about it -- all at the same time. Like a critical mass. You know how cells vibrate and once in a while all the cells in like a table vibrate in the same direction so the table actually moves?

DEBORAH. No.

HELEN. Love.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma, Ruth, Esther). (*A sound.*)

SWOOSH!!!

HELEN. It's like before a big storm.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma, Ruth, Esther). Dark night.

CHORUS (Ruth). This October night.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma). A surge.

CHORUS (Esther). Magnetic.

CHORUS (Ruth). Darkly pulling.

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CHORUS (Rachel-Alma). Feel it?

CHORUS (Esther). Pulling.

CHORUS (Ruth). North. (*Helen starts to say "love" again and Deborah claps her hand over Helen's mouth.*)

DEBORAH. Say that word one more time and I'll kick your tight little butt to the curb. Are you going to drop it? (*Helen nods.*) Are you going to think about something else? (*Helen nods. Deborah removes her hand, carefully wipes each finger with a napkin.*)

HELEN. This morning when I go out there's a woman taping these fliers on poles and bus shelters. She has relatives that Hitler killed like I do, but she doesn't know anything about them. Like nothing, she says. She tried all her life in all kinds of ways to find out their names or something, but no luck. She says she has to find out or she doesn't know who she is. She says the fliers are a "last ditch effort to find them." She's nervous and shaky. I feel bad so I tell her I'll help distribute them. She's old, like 30 or something, but she doesn't look good like you. She's scared. She really needs help.

DEBORAH. It's not my problem.

HELEN. Helping people is the best way to find --

DEBORAH. (*Interrupting.*) I'm warning you.

HELEN. ...to find you-know-what that we aren't going to talk or think about.

DEBORAH. My life is already overflowing with you-know-what.

HELEN. Helping works better than chocolate or books or advice from bartenders. I guess. I was never actually in a bar before. (*Deborah turns to leave. Helen blocks her exit. Helen starts to read a flyer out loud.*) "Help! I need to talk to people who had relatives murdered at Auschwitz on October 18, 1944. Please come to -- "

DEBORAH. (*Interrupting.*) October 18?

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SHIFT

Early that evening. Ruth is in her chair. On the table beside her is a bowl of soup. Rachel-Alma enters the apartment.

RUTH. Did you buy liver?

RACHEL-ALMA. I hate liver.

RUTH. Chicken liver?

RACHEL-ALMA. Yuck.

RUTH. What Jew hates chicken liver? *(No reply.)* Where were you so long?

RACHEL-ALMA. I called Mr. Cooper. He declined your invitation to tea and *kugel*. The interview is still on for tomorrow.

RUTH. What else?

RACHEL-ALMA. Did you hear me?

RUTH. Where else were you?

RACHEL-ALMA. Kinkos.

RUTH. A boyfriend?

RACHEL-ALMA. You didn't eat your soup.

RUTH. Ach! It's me! Men don't want a wife with a blind grandmother in the bargain.

RACHEL-ALMA. Changing the subject?

RUTH. Hatching a plan?

RACHEL-ALMA. If I have to.

RUTH. Today in particular one of your plans would be an epic disaster.

RACHEL-ALMA. Eat your soup. I put rosemary. *Geshmak.* How you like it.

RUTH. What's the big hurry?

RACHEL-ALMA. Do you want me to warm it up?

RUTH. You eat. Men like women with meat on their bones.

RACHEL-ALMA. I have plenty of men.

RUTH. Yah. You beat them off with a stick. *(Rachel-Alma puts a spoonful of soup to Ruth's lips. Ruth pushes it aside.)*

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RUTH. You are cooking up a crackpot plan. I can tell.

RACHEL-ALMA. Give me a few names and I won't have to.

RUTH. *Oy vey!*

RACHEL-ALMA. Three names? Two?

RUTH. *Fardrai zich deyn kopt.*

RACHEL-ALMA. Speak English.

RUTH. Do you feed me so I'll talk? Is that the plan?

RACHEL-ALMA. You want to starve to death?

RUTH. Good idea.

RACHEL-ALMA. I don't like upsetting you.

RUTH. No. I said NO. *Fartik!*

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). I am done.

RUTH. *Farshtaist?*

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). Understand?

RUTH. Done.

RACHEL-ALMA. If you had told Mom about then she wouldn't have killed herself.

RUTH. Get away from me! Take your *farcockteh* soup!

RACHEL-ALMA. Damn it! Sit in your miserable chair drowning in your miserable self, afraid of every airplane, afraid to take showers... Giving up on life.

RUTH. You should talk.

RACHEL-ALMA. I'm not giving up.

RUTH. Forget rosemary. Put poison, then I will eat. Then you will have no more problem with me.

RACHEL-ALMA. You're one of the lucky ones. Act lucky!

RUTH. *(Fingers plugging her ears.) Ich vill nicht vesn!*

RACHEL-ALMA. You can hear me.

RUTH. Not a word.

RACHEL-ALMA. Plenty of survivors lead regular lives. They buy onesies for grandkids. Try on housedresses at Loehmann's. Bitch about the price of store bagels. They sit in the sun; feed the pigeons. Their daughters don't kill themselves. Their granddaughters can get through an interview without passing out.

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RUTH. I tell you and like magic you are happy-go-lucky Miss America?

RACHEL-ALMA. Don't mock me.

RUTH. That tone of voice is a red flag. What *mishegoss* this time? Like the library plan?

RACHEL-ALMA. It was night. I couldn't see the return slot.

RUTH. A flashlight?

RACHEL-ALMA. I didn't have one.

RUTH. So you used matches?

RACHEL-ALMA. Nothing got burned but my coat.

RUTH. You and your *fakakta* plans.

RACHEL-ALMA. It wasn't a plan. It was an accident.

RUTH. Miss Fuzzy?

RACHEL-ALMA. She had mats. Somebody had to cut her fur.

RUTH. With a razor?

RACHEL-ALMA. I was only eight.

RUTH. Rushing ahead. Not thinking.

RACHEL-ALMA. I didn't mean to shave off her nipples.

RUTH. Consider consequences, my child.

RACHEL-ALMA. This time I have. (*SOUND: radiator hisses. RUTH tenses up.*) It's the radiator.

RUTH. Turn it off.

RACHEL-ALMA. It's old. It's stuck. Boy do I identify!

RUTH. I will not dig up the grave of a nightmare.

RACHEL-ALMA. I will. Tonight. Without your help.

SHIFT

Esther is stuffing a chicken. Things are not running smoothly. Stuffing this chicken is like wrestling with a greased pig.

ESTHER. (*Calls to young daughter in the next room.*) Tylenol takes two minutes, Hanna Banana. Count one-hippopotamus, two-hippopotamus up to 120 hippopotamuses. (*To herself.*)

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Hippopotami? Don't teach her wrong. (*Calls.*) One hundred-twenty, honey. Lie still and count. (*SOUND: oven timer rings. She checks something in the oven; resets the timer.*) Five more minutes, that'll be done. That's done. That's almost -- This -- (*To her deceased mother.*) Not to worry, Mama. I kept Hannah home from school. A sniffle and a headache -- of course I did. Everything's under control. The evening meal will be flawless. (*To herself.*) A sniffle won't develop into pneumonia. Will it? I gave her Tylenol. That was right, wasn't it? This morning Lily bit Dr. Greenberg and drew blood. A small matter. I apologized again and again. He still might drop us. He might put us on a dental blacklist. We'll lose our teeth. The apartment. Aaron's job. We'll have to live on the street and gum scraps from garbage cans. Hold still, chicken! I'm the mother. I should know how to keep my child from biting the dentist. You never taught me that, Mama. You never taught me --

CHORUS (Ruth as a child). One hundred twenty!

ESTHER. (*Calls.*) One more minute, sweet girl! Count to 60.

CHORUS (Ruth as a child). I wanna go to McDonalds!

ESTHER. Wash your mouth with soap, Hannah Cohen! (*To herself.*) Oh God. I'm the worst mother ever. (*Calls.*) I love you! I'll be there in a minute. (*To herself.*) What if she has a brain tumor? What if I'm in here chopping, boiling, braising, stuffing and when I finally go in she's dead? I didn't put a cool washcloth on her forehead. I minimized how much it hurt. I didn't check on her often enough. I'll sit with her. The second I get this *yutzi* bird -- ancestral recipe entrusted to me. Aaron has his legacy -- stories of bravery and sacrifice handed down in his family. These recipes -- my legacy. (*Calls.*) I'm coming, honey! Supper will be perfect. There will be love in every single bite.

CHORUS (Ruth as a child). Sixty!

ESTHER. (*Smells smoke from the oven.*) It's burning!
(*SOUND: oven timer rings. The chicken slides to the floor. Things aren't going well for Esther today.*)

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CHOREOGRAPHED SEQUENCE II

An open space. All are there – apart from each other, backs turned to each other. Ruth has her suitcase.

RUTH. Mama tied bows in my hair, shined my shoes so I could see my face in them. She made every corner of our house on the farm in Mielec immaculate so a rabbi could eat off the floor and find nothing to question. The kitchen smelled of roast chicken. My pillow cover like fresh air. Mama had a critical eye. If something was not up to her standards, she did not rest until it was. Maybe not fixed how you liked it, but right for her, so it was right. I needed her to show me how to be. (*Ruth spits on the suitcase -- ptui! ptui! ptui! -- three times to ward off evil spirits.*)

HELEN. In third grade we go on a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Miss Campbell talks about paintings and artists with big names that will be on the test the next day. There's a little side room. I slide sideways like a sliver. I get lost from the group accidentally on purpose. There's only one drawing in the little room. It's charcoal. Black, white, gray -- the size of the "Out for Lunch" sign Dad puts on the door of Golden's Fine and Estate Jewelry when business is slow and his stomach is rumbling. I fall into that drawing. Not literally. I let myself like float off the marble floor, through the frame, behind the glass, into the darkness of the drawing. There I am inside it, standing in a line of people. There's men in uniforms with sticks with metal tips. There's black smoke coming out of tall chimneys in back. Hard wind. No trees. People in a line they don't want to be in, going somewhere they don't want to go, but nobody says "no." Nobody gets out of line. Even the kids are quiet. Me too. I stay in the line. (*Pause.*) At supper I ask Mom what it's about. She leans over the prunes and gives me a look. I figure it out from that. (*Pause.*) I'm always living inside that picture now, behind

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glass, trying hard not to feel anything. So far I've been successful.

CHORUS (Esther, Rachel-Alma, Deborah). Helen, needing to move forward. (*Helen moves behind Ruth, making a line.*)

ESTHER. I'm a good Jew. A good wife. A good mother. I live behind the kitchen door with my legacy.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma, Deborah). Esther, needing to move forward. (*Esther moves into the line behind Helen.*)

DEBORAH. Mother was in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Now she's in Riverview Home. She used to look like Lana Turner. Men after her in droves. Countless affairs. She sucked people in like an Electrolux. Inhaled them. Once she said: You're inside me, Deborah. I feel your body inside my chest. I taste you in my mouth. You give me heartburn.

CHORUS (Rachel-Alma). Deborah, needing to move forward. (*Deborah moves to stand in line behind Esther.*)

CHORUS (Ruth). Four wool skirts, torn. Four tops. One jacket.

CHORUS (Esther). Mud.

CHORUS (Ruth). Mud.

CHORUS (Helen). Frozen mud.

CHORUS (Ruth). Two wedding bands, one pencil stub, five photographs. (*Rachel-Alma examines the lines on her palms.*)

RACHEL-ALMA. A Vietnamese monk said: "If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. You are the continuation of these people. They are alive, each present in your body, in the moment when the new sun rises."

CHORUS (Ruth). Second generation. Third generation.

RACHEL-ALMA. There's nothing but a depression where my mother's head was on the pillow.

CHORUS (Esther, Helen, Deborah). Rachel-Alma, needing to move forward.

CHORUS (Ruth). A fire storm. Winds in a column. Hot air rising.

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CHORUS (Esther, Deborah). Grief!

CHORUS (Ruth). In the air!

CHORUS (Deborah, Esther, Helen). Grief!

RACHEL-ALMA. Not after tonight. Help will come. (*Rachel-Alma does not get in the line. Ruth picks up her suitcase. Light shifts so they are all in silhouette. SOUND: a large dog barks.*)

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