

Meryl Cohn
from *Naked with Fruit*

***CHARACTERS:**

ISABEL— Attractive, likable, early 30s.

DR. MARILYN LIPSCHITZ- GOULD – A therapist, 40s. Extra-supportive.

ROSALIE—Marilyn’s 13-year-old daughter. Offstage Voice only.

SKY– Happy, earnest, extraordinarily hyperactive, 30s.

RABBI ADELE ZWILLENBERG – Grumpy, but tender under brusque exterior, 40s.

HARRIET – The Rabbi’s assistant, 30 to 50.

NURSE - Stern over-the-top butch in a white nurse’s uniform. Same actor as Harriet.

*NOTE: The seven roles require five actors. The actor playing Harriet also plays the nurse, and may also do the offstage voice of Rosalie.

SETTING: Manhattan. Springtime. Emphasis on fast scene changes, not elaborate sets.

PROLOGUE

(**ISABEL**, in a spotlight.)

(Cheerfully) Once you know it’s there, inside you, you can’t ever forget it. You’re on your knees, gardening, your fingers deep in the soil, about to plant tulip bulbs, and you remember. Maybe you’re eating sushi, or lying on a warm beach, or making love, and you think, “Is today the day?” I imagine it bursting in my head like a tomato. My face will go blank. My body will crumble, and that will be that.

SCENE I

(**DR. MARILYN LIPSCHITZ-GOULD**’s Office. **MARILYN**, a psychologist in her early 40s, alternates between eating a piece of fruit and crying. **HER** cell phone rings. **SHE** wipes her face and composes herself, then answers the phone.)

MARILYN

(On cell phone) Hello? Hi Sweetie. Didn’t you eat lunch? So, order a pizza. No— if you ask them to leave the pizza in the hallway, they’ll think you’re a *weirdo*. (Kinder tone)

MARILYN (continued)

I'm sorry, Sweetie. Mommy's just a little sad today. Okay, my next client is here. Bye, Rabbit. See you tonight.

(**SKY ENTERS**, carrying two cups of coffee.)

SKY

I brought you a cup of coffee but I don't want to have a whole conversation exploring why I would do that. So please just drink it and enjoy it and don't mention it.

MARILYN

Thank you! Milk?

SKY

Yes. You don't seem like the type to take it black. I'm intuitive about things like that.

MARILYN

So, Sky...last week, we talked about you feeling like 'a freak among your peers.' Can you say more about that?

SKY

I don't think so.

MARILYN

Why not?

SKY

I *don't* feel like a freak among my peers.

MARILYN

That's what you said the last time you were here....

SKY

Not me.

MARILYN

Yes, you. (**MARILYN** shuffles papers) Wait a minute. Oops. So, Sky... You were saying that you felt *unheard* and *invisible*. Can you tell me about the first time you felt that way? Unheard and invisible? (Pause) Is something wrong?

SKY

Do you think we should just skip over the fact that you mistook me for someone else? I mean, Hello? Damaging!

MARILYN

(Claps loudly) You're right. That's great, Sky. Good for you!

SKY

Clapping is condescending.

MARILYN

I'm sorry, Sky. I don't blame you for being upset. I'm just a little sad and distracted today. But I am fully here now; you have my total attention.

SKY

(Softens) Why are you sad?

MARILYN

It's personal.

SKY

Couldn't you...?

MARILYN

The boundaries protect *you*.

SKY

Can't we have a normal conversation? Last time I terminated, my old therapist showed me her wedding album; nothing happened when I saw what a geek her husband was and I noticed that she was actually wearing a *maternity* wedding gown. If anything, it made me feel closer to her. What about a couple of years ago, when you took me out to dinner? The best lamb chops of my life! Small and tasty, just the right amount of garlic...

MARILYN

We were celebrating the resolution of your food issues. Our dinner was therapeutic.

SKY

Do you think we might be friends if I weren't your client?

MARILYN

Is that what you imagine? Being friends?

(**SKY**'s cell phone rings. **SHE** looks at the number.)

SKY

It's Alice Bernstein! (On phone) Hey Baby! What? You're kidding! Okay!
(Cheerfully, to **MARILYN**) I gotta go. Alice Bernstein is desperate for my help!

MARILYN

Do you think it's wise to leave therapy because your girlfriend needs you? You've made a commitment...

SKY

It's not like it was going very well here today.

MARILYN

Sky, I apologize if...

SKY

(Lightly) Skip it.

(**SKY** retrieves the coffee that she bought for **MARILYN** and leaves.)

(**END of SCENE**)

(**Please note that this is not consecutive; we have skipped seven scenes to get to this one, below.**)

SCENE VIII

(**RABBI** stands in a spotlight and addresses her congregation -- the audience.)

RABBI

Here's the part no one tells you: Losing a person is a lot like losing the hard drive on your computer. Everything that was stored there, inside the other person, which you felt you could always access, is gone. All of the information, all of the shared memories are...deleted. I don't mean to make it sound cold, as if my partner were the equivalent of an external hard drive. It's just that I thought I'd always be able to say: 'Who was that woman at Carolyn's party, who danced all night?' 'What's the name of that opera we saw on our first date?' Or even, 'Who am I? Am I the same person I was 12 years ago when we first met?' (Pause) 'Can I possibly exist without you?'

You begin to attach meaning to objects: This is the pillow that still smells like her hair. Here is the shirt that smells like her shampoo, her sweat. You wonder if you should keep it in a plastic bag, if the scent will last longer. The funny thing is that some of the questions you feel desperate to answer eventually recede. You get used to the gap in the universe, the same way you get used to a limp, or driving around a familiar pothole every day on your way to work. And then... you're just stuck with the mundane business of daily life.

My Rachel was a painter and her paintings are magnificent. I value them so much because they connect me to what she saw, the world through her eyes, which is just a little more beautiful than what I normally see.

Maybe it seems gloomy for a Rabbi to do a whole service centered on the theme of loss. But now that it's in the forefront for me, because of my partner's death --- my Rachel-- I

RABBI (continued)

realize that it's a mistake to skip over grief as a topic, or to include it only briefly at Yahrzeit. Maybe loss is exactly what we need to talk about. For example, as we have seen in this week's Torah portion, when the children of Israel walk into the Sea of Reeds, they are leaving everything behind. Everything they know. The loss they must feel is great. But perhaps we learn a lesson here. Perhaps we must all walk forward anyway, braving the water, bringing with us all of our loss, still hoping for the best. That we will not drown.

Shabbat Shalom.