4 Women

A new play by Ariel Stess

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CHARACTERS

KARA Female. Forties.

EMMA Female. Twenties.

BARBARA Female. Sixties.

MIRANDA Female. Thirties.

*DENNIS Male. Forties.

*MATT Male. Sixties.

*GEORGE Male. Forties.

*DOUG Male. Fifties.

SET

A fragment of a well-to-do kitchen in a well-to-do home.

The sound of a winter mountain peak.

A brand new camping tent, somehow sparkly and idyllic, in the distance.

FORM

Much of the play is in monologue form: the female characters tell the story. We understand their experience through their eyes, bodies, and language.

When more than two women are in a scene together, the main monologist's name will be bolded to illustrate that we are inside of her experience.

Quotes are used to delineate dialogue.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

There are no stage directions. I ask director and actors to create the choreography or physical movement during a rehearsal process.

Physical action should not disrupt the play's rhythm and monologues.

CASTING

*MATT and GEORGE can be double-cast.
*DENNIS and DOUG can be double-cast.

PERFORMANCE

Monologists should connect with the audience when they speak: they should tell their story to the audience.

When a second character enters the scene, the monologist should engage in dialogue with her scene partner.

The play is a mix of dialogue, narration, and stream of consciousness.
The play should shift, nearly unnoticeably, between these modes of storytelling.

The play and performance style are inspired by *The Vagina Monologues* and *I Am My Own Wife*.

~ KARA (40s) ~
IN A BIG HOUSE ON A MOUNTAIN

KARA
When I come home to him and our family, he is as he usually is: gentle and smart and preoccupied. He is paying one fourth of attention to me and three fourths of attention to his business, his fantasies, or maybe our babysitter. Having one fourth of a man's attention is as good as it will ever be.

Our home is finally built. The hallways smell like paint and sawdust. Dennis, my husband, walks up and down them after the boys go to bed drinking from his glass of Scotch. I busy myself in the kitchen going through bills and greeting cards, tossing receipts, and wiping down our counters. I wonder, "Has Seth remembered to put in his retainer before bed?" "Has Lucas washed his face?"

The outside desert is buzzing but when I peer through our windows to the outside, I only see myself: wispy hair and floating eyes.

When Dennis finds me at the kitchen counter, he says,

DENNIS
"I've missed you."

KARA
When he kisses me, he thanks me for taking such good care of my dying mother in Fort Lauderdale. We have sex. He feels like a building inside my twirling body and it is not satisfying. I feel I am ricocheting off our walls, but we have barely moved.

DENNIS
"Tomorrow we take the boys to camp,"

KARA
he says. I nod. "I'm going to miss them."
"The babysitter, Emma…" I say. "This evening, when we dropped her off at her home, the boys seemed so attached to her. Do you think they forgot me while I was away?"

DENNIS
"Three months is a long time for kids to be without their mom,"

KARA
Dennis says.

Dennis grabs Strawberry, Banana, Orange Juice from our fridge. After taking two big gulps, he leaves the juice on the counter.

I twist my skirt around so that the tag is toward the back again. He pulls his jeans back on and blows his nose.

DENNIS
“But, no, baby, I don’t think they forgot you. They can’t ever forget their mama.”

KARA
I open the fridge and place the juice on the shelf of the door. It wobbles as I close it. My fingerprints still faint on this refrigerator handle, the stainless steal, mark my daily rituals. I’ve tried to wipe them off before. It never works.

DENNIS
“Tonight I have a lot of work to catch up on, love. Alright if I don’t make it to bed for a while? I’m so glad you’re home. I’m sorry about your lovely mother. She was so good and strong.”

KARA
“It’s been a long day. I’ll be happy to have some me time. Goodnight, love.”

I don’t brush my teeth. I toss my clothes into the bin and slip on my oversized T-shirt. The bed is cold but refreshing. The sheets feel stiff and clean. I shudder as I fall asleep. Between bits of twirling dreams, I see my mother, standing tall and straight and proud. There’s a world of joy coming through her eyes.

~EMMA (21)~

IN DENNIS AND KARA'S RANGE ROVER / AT HER MOM'S HOUSE

EMMA
I feel so small in Dennis and Kara's family car. Seth and Lucas tell me they'll miss me while they're away. I open the back door and hop out. "Remember to write me from camp!"

"We will!" they yell back in unison.

I go to the driver's side window and Dennis thanks me for my work tonight with the boys, says what a good babysitter I am. He asks if my mom is home yet. I shake my head no. "She's out dancing and won't be home for quite a while."

DENNIS
"You okay to be alone?"

EMMA
he asks. He has forgotten my age. "I'm twenty-one years-old," I say. "I'll be fine. Thanks."

DENNIS
"We'll see you soon then, Emma,"

EMMA
he says and smiles. In the passenger seat, Kara pulls the mirror down. A light flickers on, glowing down onto her brow while she checks her mascara and the shape of her eyes.

Dennis speeds out of the gravel lot. His car disappears in the end of the sunset. I use the combination I've used for years to open the garage door. I can hear the sound of the weight of the door. Inside, puddles of oil dot the floor and boxes are clumped along the perimeters. My mother has never unpacked from her divorce fourteen years earlier. I shut the door and head inside and wonder if I really will see Dennis soon. Will he follow through with his plan to be with me, to pick me up, and drive far, far away? Guys are super fickle, I remember. So, ya know, we'll see.

I climb the stairs up to my mother's bedroom where the salmon furniture is covered in a thin film of dust. My mother's patio door is swollen shut I guess because of all the rain this summer and the fact that her fuck buddy left town a year ago and stopped fixing shit around here. I use the weight of my body to pull the door open and go outside. Phewy! So pretty out here.

I get myself up onto the roof, grab my cigarettes from my back pocket, and light one.

I exhale into the far off pink and firelight at the bottom of the sky. I'm so high up and can see so much of the land from up here and it makes me think I could just walk along the whole continent in a few big strides. I'm a giant, I think.

"I'm a giant!" I accidentally say.

I've been spacing out for hours. Just imagining a hundred futures: me and Dennis building our own home in another Southwestern town full of money and confusion and need; me, away at school presenting a book report to a class full of rich kids who are finally impressed by my, um, "acumen" and "eloquence"; me, in Hawaii learning to surf and taking shifts at a local juice bar; me, with a young, sexy brown-haired boyfriend, like Jake from Sixteen Candles, who is massaging me and whispering that I'm beautiful and saying, "I think it's cool that you don't know how to cook yet, there's still time to learn."

It's after midnight.

My lips are chapped.

I fell asleep up here. Barbara's home.

BARBARA
"What are you doing up?"

EMMA
she asks.

"So you decided to come home?"

BARBARA
"I had a really fun night with Danny."

EMMA
"Please, don't say more," I say.

BARBARA
"He's a good guy when he settles down."

EMMA
"Please, no more, Barbara."

BARBARA
"Fine,"

EMMA
she says.

She comes inside and then walks out onto the balcony. She can see me from there looking down at her.

BARBARA
“You’re still smoking?”

EMMA
she asks.

“Yes,” I say.

BARBARA
“It’s not good for you.”

EMMA
“Can I get another one?”

Barbara throws a pack of American Spirits up to me.

BARBARA
“Sure, don’t listen to me,”

EMMA
she mumbles.

BARBARA
“I’m only your mother.”

EMMA
Ugh. Like that matters.

BARBARA
“You still spending time with that man?”

EMMA
“What man?”

BARBARA
“That married man.”

EMMA
“I’m taking care of his children, Barbara.”

BARBARA
“Okay. But I think you should stay away from that family.”

EMMA
“And what, come work with you at their restaurant? You work for them too.”

BARBARA
“Well at least then it wouldn’t be so…”

EMMA
She’s like searching the whole universe for some word.

BARBARA
“…intimate!”

EMMA
“Doesn’t sound much better. Restaurant work. Can get intimate too.”

BARBARA
“I’m going to bed. You’re gonna wake me when you come down.”

EMMA
“I’ll be quiet.” You never wake up, I think. I inhale.

“Thanks for these.”

My mother eventually turns out her lights. The stars are tiny and everywhere. My mouth is dry and I wonder if I should start to pack. My phone rings. It’s Dennis.

EMMA
“Hello?”

DENNIS
“It’s me.”

EMMA
“I know. Hi.”

DENNIS
“Why are you so quiet?”

EMMA
“My mom came home. She’s asleep.”

DENNIS
“Are you packing?”

EMMA
“Should I be?”

DENNIS
“Yes.”

EMMA
“Are you um sure that I’m good enough for you? That I’ll be enough for you?”

DENNIS
“Oh my god.”

EMMA
“Sorry, I’m sorry. It’s been a weird night with Kara, your wife, coming home. Picking her up at the airport, your long embrace I dunno.”

“So, I should be packing?”

DENNIS
“I always keep my word, Emma. You don’t have to second-guess me.”

EMMA
I pick up my journal and start to write.

I am a bullet traveling through a sea of people who know who they are and what they’re doing and I have sliced through their goals and their plans and upended their rituals and deadlines and phone calls and holidays. Now, they all look down in unison to see that they have a hole in their chests and cold air is pushing through them. They turn the heat up in their big middle class homes or stand pulsing next to their upper class fireplaces and dance and hook up and stretch inside their silk or down or wool comforters. But they cannot stop the chilly air streaming through their chests. This is what I will accomplish in this life --- I will pierce the people who have made it and push a draft into the lives they worked so hard to build.

I finish writing in my journal and pack it into my suitcase. I add a lavender neck pillow, for calmness, and zip it up. Tomorrow, after he drops his boys off at camp, he’s gonna pick me up and take me out of here.