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4000 Miles

by Amy Herzog

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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***4000 Miles* was originally produced by
Lincoln Center Theater in 2011,
New York City**

***4000 MILES* was written in the SoHo Rep Writer/Director Lab**

4000 MILES first opened at The Duke Theater in New York City on June 20, 2011, presented by Lincoln Center Theatre/LCT3, as a Steinberg New Works Program production, under the direction of André Bishop and Bernard Gersten, and Paige Evans, LCT3 Artistic Director. The sets were designed by Lauren Helpert, costumes designed by Kaye Voyce, lighting designed by Japhy Weideman, sound designed by Ryan Rumery, stage management by Kasey Ostopchuck, general management by Adam Siegel, and production management by Jeff Hamlin. The director was Daniel Aukin. The cast was as follows:

LEO JOSEPH-CONNELL Gabriel Ebert
VERA JOSEPH Mary Louise Wilson
BEC Zoë Winters
AMANDA Greta Lee

4000 MILES moved to the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater in New York City, opening on April 2, 2012, presented by Lincoln Center Theatre, under the direction of André Bishop and Bernard Gersten. The sets were designed by Lauren Helpert, costumes designed by Kaye Voyce, lighting designed by Japhy Weideman, sound designed by Ryan Rumery, and stage management by Kasey Ostopchuck. The director was Daniel Aukin. The cast was as follows:

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CHARACTERS

LEO JOSEPH-CONNELL – Twenty-one

VERA JOSEPH – Ninety-one

BEC – Twenty-one

AMANDA – Nineteen, Chinese-American

SETTING

September of a recent year – maybe 2007. A spacious rent-controlled apartment in Greenwich Village that hasn't been redecorated since approximately 1968. The key decorative element is books.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue. Where the slash appears, the next line begins.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the SoHo Rep Writer/Director Lab and especially Pirronne Yousefzadeh; Paige Evans, André Bishop, Bernard Gersten and the wonderful staff of Lincoln Center; John Buzzetti; all the endlessly patient and good-humored Josephs, especially the Midwest branch; my beloved cast; the brilliant Daniel Aukin and his cracker-jack design team; as always, my partner, Sam Gold.

*For Pavel and Leepie
In memory of Jay*

Scene One

(The middle of the night.)

(LEO, 21, lanky, fit, and dirty, stands just inside the apartment, his laden bike next to him. He is smiling broadly. VERA, 91, tiny and frail but not without fortitude, is in her nightgown. Her eyes have not adjusted to the light. She covers her mouth because she hasn't put her teeth in. Her speech is altered for the same reason. She is quite disoriented.)

(A pause in which he grins and she is uncomprehending.)

LEO. You haven't changed the name. On the buzzer.

VERA. What?

LEO. The buzzer! It still says Joe Joseph!

VERA. So?

LEO. So you should change it. Put your name on there.

VERA. That is my name.

LEO. Your name isn't *Joe* Joseph.

VERA. ...well...

LEO. Just seems like it's time.

(pause)

I can help you with that, if you want. I'm pretty handy.

VERA. *(slurred)* You need a place to stay, is that it?

LEO. Sorry, what?

VERA. *(still covering her mouth, still slurred)* You need a place to stay?

LEO. I can't understand you when you –

(He reaches to move her hand away from her mouth; startled, she draws back, almost losing her balance.)

Sorry.

VERA. Will you – wait here.

(She exits, still covering her mouth. He leans the bike against a bookcase and takes off one of the panniers – this takes some effort – it is extremely heavy. He puts it down on the floor noisily. VERA reenters, less disoriented, with teeth, and putting her hearing aid in.)

Are you high?

LEO. What? No.

VERA. Well, it's three o'clock in the morning so I'm just asking. Have you eaten anything in a while?

LEO. I'm cool.

VERA. That's not what I asked you. You've lost weight.

LEO. It's been a long road, but a good one.

VERA. You biked all the way here?

LEO. Pretty much.

VERA. From Minnesota?

LEO. Actually we started in Seattle.

(brief pause)

VERA. There are some mountains in the middle, aren't there, whichever way you go?

LEO. There are. There are.

VERA. I'll get you a banana.

LEO. A – no! Whoa, jet fuel.

VERA. What?

LEO. NO SUCH THING AS A LOCAL BANANA!

VERA. You don't have to yell, it's only when you speak very low or very fast that I can't hear you.

LEO. I'm just concerned about you, I was leaning on that buzzer for quite a while.

VERA. Yes, well, I was asleep, and I didn't have my, whadaya-callit, hearing aid in, and I wasn't expecting you.

LEO. Would you hear a fire alarm?

VERA. What?

LEO. WOULD YOU HEAR / A –

VERA. I heard you, listen, it's – it's the way you're acting I don't understand, actually, not your...the whole family's been very worried, I guess you know that. Your mother and father –

LEO. I'm sorry people worried, I am, but that's not something I can take responsibility for?

VERA. You should have called. You should have called your mother. She's been...she's really been...

(He picks up his pannier, goes to reattach it.)

LEO. *(warmly, apparently sincerely)* Grandma Vera. It was awesome to see you.

VERA. What? – You're –

LEO. It's cool, I don't think either of us has to feel bad about the fact that the timing isn't right for me to be here.

VERA. You're going to – where will you go?

LEO. I have a tent and a camping stove and a love for the outdoors, I'll be all right.

VERA. You're in Manhattan!

LEO. Maybe you can give me a tip, somewhere out of the way?

VERA. There's no place like that! Listen, you're being – put that back down. Put it down.

(He hesitates.)

You can leave tomorrow, I won't stop you. Just – sleep here for a few hours, and take a shower, and eat some breakfast. I can wash those – you smell terrible and I wouldn't be surprised if you had lice.

LEO. I don't have lice.

VERA. And you don't seem all right to me, you don't... seem all right.

LEO. *(still smiling)* It's just, if this is gonna be about calling Jane, and a last minute, hellaciously overpriced plane flight for which she has to take a valium because she's a phobic freak, and I wake up in the morning and she's here with a valium hangover –

VERA. I'm not a reporter.

LEO. Meaning?

VERA. Meaning I'm not a news reporter and I won't call your mother if that's what you're asking me.

But the way you're talking about her, it's really not fair, a lot of people don't like flying.

LEO. Jane and I are at a juncture where more talking is not better than less talking. If that's not something you can understand, I'm saying it's probably best I go set up camp somewhere else.

VERA. I don't agree with it, but I understand.

(pause)

I know what she feels like is...if you're not talking to her, she just hopes you're talking to / someone.

LEO. Oh, that is bullshit, and you know her, and you know that is passive aggressive *bullshit!* *She* wants to talk about it! *She!* I am fine!

VERA. *(with genuine feeling)* Well. I did want to say how sorry I am. That must have been –

LEO. Thank you.

(Silence. This has gotten to him, and she sees it.)

VERA. You what, came over the GW?

LEO. The – ?

VERA. The George Washington Bridge?

LEO. I guess, yeah.

VERA. Was it pretty? At night?

LEO. ...Yeah, actually. Yeah. I'm not much of a city guy, but. It was all right.

VERA. I'm – I must say I'm surprised, and this is not a complaint, that you came here, instead of your – I've lost track whether she's your girlfriend or not, the chubby one, isn't she up at / whaddayacallit –

LEO. She's not chubby.

VERA. She's – well she's not *thin*.

LEO. She's healthy, she's / strong.

VERA. I don't see what that has to do with it.

LEO. She's not *chubby*.

VERA. All *right*. I thought if you ended up in New York you might have gone there.

LEO. I stopped by.

(brief pause)

VERA. She had another fella with her, is that / it?

LEO. No, Vera, she didn't have – it's just not good timing. It turns out. Which I respect. She said she needed to do some *thinking*. Thinking is good.

VERA. Well it's been a lousy coupla months for you then, between one thing and another.

(pause)

Would you take a shower before you get in bed?

Leo?

LEO. What? Yeah. Shower sounds great.

VERA. You all right?

LEO. Yeah! Yeah.

(He picks up the pack and begins to head offstage. She stops him.)

VERA. Where are you going?

LEO. Guest room.

VERA. No, that one's my room now.

LEO. I thought that – I thought that was yours.

VERA. Not since Joe was sick. We moved in there for the, whaddayacallit, single beds and I stayed. Has it been that long since you've been here?

LEO. I was here for the funeral. I guess I forgot.

VERA. That was a long time ago.

(He hesitates.)

You need anything else?

LEO. No, I –
Grandma –

VERA. Yes?

(His uncertainty dissolves into a big smile.)

LEO. ...good night.

(He exits.)

Scene Two

(The next day, late morning.)

(VERA enters through the front door with a laundry cart. She has some trouble maneuvering it through the door and into the apartment. She is taking care to be quiet. Once she has gotten the cart in and closed the door, she goes offstage to LEO's bedroom. A pause. She comes back, satisfied that he is still asleep.)

(She takes the laundry from the cart, piece by piece, and folds it. Bike jerseys and shorts. Those wicking pieces of athletic clothing. Tiny cycling socks. She regards them all with some suspicion.)

(The phone rings. At the first ring, she tenses, listens to see if she heard right. At the second ring, she looks anxiously toward the bedroom where LEO is sleeping and moves as quickly as she can to the old rotary phone.)

VERA. Hello.

Hold on.

(She takes her whining hearing aid out.)

Hello.

(mild irritation verging on imperiousness)

Yes, darling, what?

I'm not done with it.

I'm not done with it yet.

I know what time it is, but as a matter of fact my grandson is here so I've been busy.

Yes, well, it was a surprise, he came and surprised me, so.

Well that's – listen –

Hello?

(She looks at the phone.)

Hello?

(She shakes her head and hangs up.)

Pain in the ass.

(She goes back to the laundry and continues to fold, still periodically shaking her head. After a few moments, LEO enters, disheveled but clean.)

LEO. Hey.

(She continues to fold.)

Vera.

(She looks up with the startled look of half-deaf people who aren't sure whether they heard something, and want to cover if they did, and sees LEO.)

VERA. Oh!

(She fumbles in her pockets for her hearing aid and puts it back in.)

The phone woke you?

LEO. No.

VERA. It was Ginny across the hall. I give her the arts section when I'm done with it and I'm late today. Never mind she's never given me a nickel for it, that's what I get for being nice. She says she's just checking in to see if I'm all right but you know she's really sitting there, stewing, resenting me, she's...well, no good deed goes unpunished, right? Did you sleep all right?

LEO. Mm-hm.

VERA. And then she just hung up! I told her you were here and she said, "Oh I'm terribly sorry" in this – like she was interrupting a big meeting or something and she just hung up without even saying – why it gets to me so much I don't know. She's just...

(She looks for the word, doesn't find it.)

She's really a character.

LEO. Huh.

VERA. But we have an arrangement where she calls me one night and I call her the next, and that way if one of us turns up our toes it won't take until we start smelling to figure it out. Which isn't really a problem for me, because I have the family, but she doesn't have anyone,

so I guess I have guilt feelings about that is what it is. And we have a lot in common in terms of the political – we both, in terms of Cuba, and the pro-peace whaddayacallit, and being progressives, we see eye to eye, but in everything else she just drives me nuts.

LEO. You're giving her too much power.

VERA. What?

LEO. That power. You gotta take it back.

(She considers this.)

VERA. Well.

If you stay longer, and I'm not saying you will, I'll show you how to, whaddayacallit. Disconnect the phone in that room, because I do get a lot of calls sometimes.

You look better. *(off his look)* What?

LEO. Good morning, Vera.

VERA. Actually it's after two –

(He interrupts her with a big bear hug. Surprised, she gives in to the totally unexpected physical affection. The embrace goes on for a little while. She closes her eyes and tries to remember it. They separate. She smiles widely at him)

You smell better, too. What did you think of that bed?

LEO. It was great, great bed.

VERA. That's what I think! You know your uncle Ben and Mel, they want me to get a new mattress. Which they do not offer to pay for. Every time they stay here they complain, and complain.

LEO. I slept like a rock.

VERA. I may quote you on that. I'll end up doing it, though, anyway, or else they'll have an excuse not to visit. You drink coffee?

LEO. Yeah, I'd love some.

(She exits. He surveys the neat little piles she's made of his stuff. He stoops and picks up a box of condoms that's seen wear and tear in his bag. He had forgotten he brought it. She reenters with coffee and a plate with a few breakfast pastries on it, maybe a couple hard boiled eggs.)

VERA. I was glad to see you carry those and surprised they weren't opened. I thought you probably take it black.

LEO. I do.

VERA. Me too, that's how I like it.

(He bites into a pastry.)

Tell me if that's completely thawed.

(He gives her the thumbs up.)

I got a few of those free a month or two ago at the Senior Center, some event, they had a buffet table and at the end they were going to throw it all away, which I did not approve of. It was lucky I thought to freeze them because otherwise I would have had to go out and get you something and I wasn't feeling completely up to it. Some days I'm myself, and some days my head really isn't right, and my balance. It's really disgusting.

LEO. Have you had it checked out?

VERA. What? Oh sure, they're all useless, they just tell me I'm old and I knew that already.

I knew you were sleeping well because you didn't wake up when I brought your whadayacallit out of your room. Moaning and groaning – that thing must weigh a hundred pounds!

LEO. Nah. About twenty.

VERA. Is that all?

LEO. Well that's one of four bags. Total weight's about fifty.

VERA. Fifty *pounds*?

LEO. More when I have food and water.

VERA. And you keep all that on your *bicycle*?

LEO. Yup.

(She can't quite believe this but has no alternative.)

VERA. Doesn't that make it a lot harder?

(He laughs, for the first time.)

LEO. Yeah, yup, that's a yes.

VERA. And you camped at night, is that it?

LEO. Usually. Sometimes I'd meet someone and be invited to crash.

VERA. You ever meet anyone really peculiar?

LEO. What do you mean?

VERA. I don't know, like some crackpot who wanted something weird from you, in exchange for...a place to stay or whatever.

LEO. Like...?

VERA. Like a – whaddayacallit, something sexual, or –

LEO. *What?*

VERA. I would think on the road like that, by yourself, you'd meet all kinds of people.

LEO. I did meet all kinds of people. None of them required sexual favors from me, no.

VERA. If you were a woman it would probably have been different; you probably would have run into all kinds of things like that.

LEO. I know a lot of women who travel alone, Bec has done a lot of traveling / alone –

VERA. Rebecca – well, all right, if you're built like *that*, but I mean a smaller / woman.

LEO. I find if you approach people with love and trust you can count on getting the same things back from them.

(brief pause)

VERA. What is that, Confucius, or...?

LEO. It's Leo Joseph-Connell. It's me.

VERA. I'm teasing you.

LEO. Okay.

VERA. I guess it's a sensitive subject.

LEO. Nope.

VERA. Well.

(pause)

LEO. You know anything about a climbing wall?

VERA. A what?

LEO. A climbing gym!

VERA. What's a climbing gym?

LEO. It's a – a gym. Where you climb. They have these walls
/ with –

VERA. Oh, with the funny, and you're in one of those
whadayacallit –

LEO. Harnesses.

VERA. Right, I've seen that. Where have I seen that? I saw
that and I thought what the hell is that for?

(She gets the yellow pages.)

You want to go today, is that it?

LEO. I was thinking about it. Get the old upper body back
to work.

*(Now with the yellow pages, she asks this studiously
casually, without looking at him.)*

VERA. So you think you might stay a little longer, is that it?
Would it be under...what would it be under?

(He takes the yellow pages from her, gently, and looks.)

LEO. Yellow pages. Man.

VERA. What?

LEO. Do you have a computer?

VERA. No, I – well yes, I have one, Ben and Mel got it for
me, but I'm not, whadayacallit. They were very happy
with themselves for getting it for me but they didn't
really show me what to do with it.

LEO. Mac or PC?

VERA. What?

LEO. We'll look at it later.

VERA. You know a lot about computers?

LEO. I don't like them. But I can use them.

VERA. I thought everyone your age liked them.

LEO. Micah never sent an email. His whole life. Which was
stubborn as shit, but you have to admire it.

VERA. Did he use the telephone?

LEO. Yeah, but he didn't have a cell phone. I don't have one either.

VERA. I know you don't, I've been hearing about that a lot lately.

(brief pause)

I guess what they say is all this, whatsit, technology is good for...from the standpoint of the people, or the – that you can get the propaganda to the people, the Marxist – I can't find the words, but in terms of Africa, and South America, and places where – that from the standpoint of being progressive and so on and so forth it can be a good thing.

(brief pause)

You know, there are a lot of bad things about getting old, but the worst one is not being able to find my words. I just hate not being able to find my words, I feel like an idiot half the time.

LEO. That it's democratizing.

VERA. What?

LEO. That with the internet, information is free to everyone, it um...de-commodifies knowledge. Which is power.

(He returns to his yellow page search.)

VERA. When you put it that way I think I should learn how to use the computer.

LEO. Marx is cool.

VERA. You think so?

LEO. He's all right.

VERA. Well I think so too.

LEO. When I did that semester at Evergreen I took a class on Marx. Best class I took.

VERA. What did your mother think of that?

LEO. About me studying Marx?

VERA. Yeah.

LEO. Uh, I think she was like, “How is that going to be useful to you, in the future?”

VERA. Oh, dear.

LEO. And I was like, first of all, who knows, and second, I think it’s important to understand where I come from, which is where you come from, too, so I’m surprised you aren’t more supportive.

VERA. (*delighted*) You said that?

LEO. I did.

VERA. And what did she say?

LEO. You know, as long as I was in college, she was happy, so I think she just shut up.

VERA. She and I don’t talk about politics anymore. I always end up telling her how disappointing she was to her father, I don’t mean to, somehow or other I just wind up saying it, and I only mean in terms of the political – not *generally*, but then she starts crying and going on about how she always votes democrat, as if that’s...it’s better we just don’t talk about it.

LEO. I find that to be true about a lot of subjects with Jane.

VERA. Well, between you and me. I guess I do too.

(A small moment of enjoying each other.)

But she was always my favorite because she was the littlest, you know she was only two when Joe and I started carrying on together. And she’s been very devoted to me, so.

LEO. Is 23rd street pretty near here?

VERA. Matter of fact you can walk there. I guess I should get you Joe’s keys.

LEO. Um –

(She doesn’t hear him and exits. He prepares himself to ask for something. She reenters with keys.)

VERA. I better show you which one does what, and you’ll get it wrong the first few times anyway but you’ll eventually learn.

LEO. Okay – I was wondering if you could spot me a few bucks? For climbing?

VERA. Oh. You're out of money, is that it?

LEO. At the moment the flow is low.

VERA. How much do you need?

LEO. I don't know what prices are like around here...I have to rent all the stuff, so like, fifty?

VERA. Fifty *dollars*?

LEO. That's what it would be in Seattle, so I guess...maybe a little more?

VERA. More than *fifty* dollars? To climb up a wall?

LEO. I'm expecting an influx in a couple days so I could pay / you back.

VERA. A what?

LEO. An influx! Of cash, into my account!

VERA. From where?

From your mother? She's still giving you money?
Well...

LEO. Forget it.

VERA. No, / listen –

LEO. Forget it! It's no big deal!

VERA. I'm going to show you where I keep the money, and then when you need some you can just take it and leave a note, all right? So I know how much you took and I won't worry about it.

All right?

LEO. All right.

VERA. And then maybe you can do some shopping, and get the things around the house you like to have for breakfast and so on and so forth.

LEO. Vera, I want to be really clear that I can't stay more than a couple days.

VERA. I understand.

LEO. It's great to rest up, but I need to make it back to Washington before it gets too cold, so.

VERA. You mean, on the bike?

LEO. Yup.

VERA. You're going to go all the way back west on that bike?

LEO. That's the plan.

(an uncomprehending pause)

VERA. Maybe if you called Rebecca today, she – since it was the middle of the night, she may not / have –

LEO. It's not / about –

VERA. Seeing as you came all this way to be with her –

LEO. I didn't.

I didn't come all this way to be with her.

VERA. Well I know it wasn't to be with *me*.

LEO. It was to finish something I started. Micah and I started something. I finished it. That's it. People want to make it really complicated but it's not.

(He gives her a big smile.)

VERA. If you stayed more than a couple days I wouldn't know what to say to your mother. I don't know what to say to her as it is. So we're in agreement.

I keep the money in Joe's study.

(She tries to stand, doesn't quite make it up, winds up and stands again. She makes her way out slowly. LEO stays seated. He is fending off a wave of nausea or vertigo.)

VERA. *(offstage)* You comin' or what?

Scene Three

(A few days later.)

(LEO is lying down, eating something and reading a book.)

(The sound of a key in the lock. It takes a long time for VERA to get the door open. She enters slowly, more off-balance than usual. She is wearing dark clothing. She sees LEO, who waves and goes back to reading.)

VERA. Did you lock the top lock?

LEO. No.

VERA. Are you sure?

LEO. Yup.

(She turns and looks at the door, perplexed.)

VERA. Well, I think you must have and then forgotten.

LEO. I haven't touched the door today, Vera.

VERA. Maybe you did it without really thinking about it.

LEO. Uh, okay, sure, I for no reason / and without thinking –

VERA. You have to speak louder if you want me to hear you.

LEO. I didn't lock the top lock!

VERA. Well...

(flustered)

all right.

LEO. Does it really matter?

VERA. I made sure I didn't lock it when I left, because it's getting harder for me to hold the, whadayacallit, the – key, because my hand shakes, which is disgusting, but then it was locked anyway so either you did it or I'm going crazy, which I must admit is very possible.

(She exits toward the bedroom, upset. He sits up. He thinks of going after her, then lies back down and continues reading. She reenters.)

I don't mind if you break something, accidents happen, but nothing drives me crazier than when somebody breaks something and doesn't tell me.

(She exits again.)

LEO. What did I break? Vera?

(He puts the book down and begins to follow her but she reenters on her way to the kitchen.)

What did I break?

VERA. Never mind, just tell me next time, all right?

LEO. Dude, I have no idea what you're talking about.

VERA. Now you're really making me mad.

LEO. Tell me what I did!

(She looks at him with disbelief.)

VERA. The faucet! In your bathroom?

(He thinks hard.)

LEO. The faucet...

VERA. Oh, gimme a break!

LEO. You gotta help me out here, Grandma.

VERA. The whaddayacallit, the...

LEO. The whaddayacallit.

VERA. Don't make fun of me!

LEO. I'm not!

VERA. The...handle, that you turn. It's completely off.

LEO. I thought it was always like that.

(She shoots him an accusing look.)

I did!

VERA. No, it wasn't "always like that." I went in there to clean this morning while you were still asleep because it was filthy, because you obviously haven't cleaned since you've been here, and that was the first time I ever saw it like that.

LEO. It came right off in my hand, I swear I thought –

VERA. Well, just tell me, is all I'm asking, I don't think that's an unreasonable request, do you?

(She exits into the kitchen. Pause.)

LEO. *(He calls off.)* Sorry!

(Loud noises come from the kitchen. LEO decides not to take this on. He lies back down and keeps reading. After a few moments she reenters, still in a state.)

VERA. In case you're interested, I just came from a funeral, so that's where I've been all morning.

LEO. Okay.

VERA. It was for the last of the octogenarians.

LEO. The what?

VERA. There were seven of us, octogenarians, and we had dinner once a month for a lot of years and we were all lefties and there were a lot of memories and laughs and the last one just died, besides me.

LEO. Sorry.

VERA. Yeah, he was a rat, very aggressive, he used to make passes at me with his wife sitting right there. She had Alzheimer's so she didn't mind, but I did. Even so, he was the last one and I don't feel very happy about it.

LEO. You want a hug from a hippie?

VERA. No, I'm all right.

(She goes back into the kitchen. A moment later she reenters. LEO goes to her and hugs her.)

And I spoke to your mother this morning, too. And I did not tell her you're here, even though you were all she talked about, and she's really, whadayacallit, in distress, and I'm not feeling terribly proud of myself.

(He separates.)

LEO. You can't take all that on. You have to let her find her own way.

VERA. Well see, that's not how I think about things. Because I believe in a...a society where...here I go with my words. The point is you help people, it's about the community, it's not about I do what's best for me and you do what's best for you, because...you know the one thing I wasn't thinking when Joe was dying was I better pay attention to what he says, about politics, because I always relied on him to, to make the arguments, and explain the...

(*She shakes her head, lost, disgusted with herself.*)

LEO. (*gently*) I've been reading this book he edited, about Cuba?

VERA. Oh, yeah?

LEO. It's really interesting. I didn't know this stuff, about their healthcare system –

VERA. Oh, their healthcare is wonderful. And literacy, too.

LEO. Grandpa's introduction is really...I don't remember him that well? You know? But I remember his voice, he had / that –

VERA. Yes.

LEO. Yeah, so I've been imagining his voice reading this, and it's like...so sure?

VERA. Indeed.

LEO. The way he writes, it's...it almost reads as a little hokey, now, because it's so – but I think it must have been cool, to be so, um. Uncynical. Like I think I'm really uncynical, and Micah was definitely totally uncynical, but *you* guys. That's like a whole other level of...I'm definitely learning about Grandpa. It's definitely cool.

(*pause*)

VERA. Your mother told me something very upsetting about you this morning that I have been debating bringing up with you at all. Do you want to know what it is?

LEO. Not really.

VERA. She said in the beginning of the summer, when you were home for a little while in St. / Paul –

LEO. Oh my *god*, she's / still –

VERA. That you tried to kiss your sister.

LEO. I cannot *believe* she is still fixated on that!

VERA. Well, that was pretty disturbing for Lily, I would think.

LEO. It was – we were all – it was so *not* disturbing, she was not disturbed, and *tried* is not really the – I mean, we

kissed, lots of people were kissing, it was like a spontaneous kissing convention, and we kissed, and it was so not a big deal except for in our totally taboo / laden –

VERA. Well, she's in therapy about it now is all I'm saying.

LEO. I cannot – ! Okay. Okay. Fine. She's in therapy, because we were both fucked on peyote and we kissed, *once*, with totally minimal tongue, and *not* because our parents are obsessed with the fact that they *don't treat her differently* just because she's adopted and never fail to mention that to her for a single day in her life. *Obviously* it was the totally harmless and even I would say pleasant smooch that sent her reeling into identity confusion. I mean, it's not like I fucked / her.

VERA. She's your sister!

LEO. Yeah! And she's awesome! And I wish she would get the fuck out of that house!

VERA. You need to learn how to take some responsibility, you know that? You're right, I've seen the way they are about the – the fact is, they didn't think they would be able to have you, when they adopted her, and – there's a guilt there, and a nervousness, but – you're a sensitive young man and you should be able to understand that and not be so angry about it. And you should be able to understand that she's vulnerable, she always has been, and kissing her wasn't the best idea. That's all. That's all.

LEO. It's just...it's hard to think of something more emblematic of our society, that a kiss expressing real mutual love between two people is considered destructive.

VERA. You know better than that.

LEO. I don't, Grandma, and I don't want to.

(*pause*)

VERA. Rebecca found out about it, is that it? And that's why she's so mad?

LEO. Bec knows about it, because she was there, and she *also* kissed Lily, incidentally, which was really beautiful, and no, she is not mad, because she's way more open-minded than that.

VERA. And I'm old and closed-minded, is that it?

LEO. You're old, but you could choose not to be closed-minded.

(He goes back to his book.)

VERA. You didn't say anything about the buzzer.

LEO. The what?

VERA. I had the super change the name on the buzzer, since you didn't seem to be getting around to it. It has my name now. Only took me ten years, but it has my name now.

LEO. Uh...congratulations? Sorry, is that – what am I supposed to say?

(Pause. He goes back to his book.)

VERA. Well.

(She stands slowly to go. She exits into the kitchen.)

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