

Acting Edition

The Roommate

by Jen Silverman

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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CHARACTERS

SHARON – F, 50s-70s

ROBYN – F, 50s-70s

SETTING

A big old house in Iowa City.

TIME

Now.

Summer.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

On the page: The spacing is a gesture toward indicating rhythm and how thoughts change, morph, contradict each other, escalate, or get supplanted by other thoughts as we talk. The line breaks often signal either an intensification of, or a shift away, from something. It doesn't indicate a beat or pause except where written. Sections of dialogue may sometimes end without punctuation. When this happens, this is a gesture toward the fluidity and energy of the exchanges. The difference between a sentence that ends with a period and one without is very slight – often the difference lies in the breath.

[] is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.

() is spoken out loud but is a side-thought.

On casting: This play welcomes diverse casting in any number of combinations. However, having Sharon played by a White actor and Robyn played by a Black actor will replicate certain worn racial tropes that this play does not intend. Please avoid that particular combination in your casting. (The reverse, however, can work quite well.)

In terms of age, you should feel free to adjust the character's age to fit the actor, regarding Sharon's line "I'm sixty-five years old" in Scene 1.

On tone: The play is often funny, but don't think of it as a pure comedy. The humor comes from a dark and often lonely place, which keeps Sharon's escalating choices from feeling like absurdist flourishes. The second the play tips into "broadness" or "farce" it loses its heart.

On music: The song on Sharon's CD in Scene 3 might be Mary Chapin Carpenter's "Transcendental Reunion." New Music at the end of Scene 3 might be Patti Smith's "Dancing Barefoot." And "World War II London Music" might be Sydney Bechet's track "Si tu vois ma mère."

1.

(The kitchen.)

(SHARON finishes helping ROBYN carry boxes in. So many boxes! One contains weird vegetables from a CSA. Some vegetables are just odd, but others look actively dangerous.)

SHARON. *(A little out of breath.)* And this is the kitchen

I'm a big cook, I love to cook

You said you cooked?

ROBYN. I cook, sure.

SHARON. Okay! Okay

Well

we can divide up the refrigerator or the pantry shelves depending on sort of *what* and *when* you cook

ROBYN. I'm a vegan

SHARON. *(Doesn't really know what that is.)* Okay! Okay...

ROBYN. No animal products.

SHARON. Okay!

So like...no meat...

ROBYN. Nope, no meat

SHARON. Or eggs

ROBYN. That would be an animal product

SHARON. Sure! Sure it would

Uh...but like, carrots

ROBYN. Yes carrots are fine

SHARON. I mean, clearly carrots are [fine]

...but for example, using pans or pots or
knives or

you know, that I've used for meat...

I mean, is that going to be...?

ROBYN. I have my own cooking utensils

in one of the boxes there's

SHARON. Oh! sure sure

yeah we can find

there's some extra cabinet space if we just
move things around a bit

ROBYN. Yeah there's a lot of space

this seems very spacious

SHARON. I mean there's *space*

it's not *palatial* but

I mean, Iowa, it specializes in

corn and *space*

(She laughs, ROBYN doesn't. Awkward.)

If you want you can leave stuff on the porch
til you're all unpacked

ROBYN. Oh no no, I don't want to take up your

SHARON. No no! that's fine

I don't use the side porch that much anyway
it's nice in the summer I guess but

(Picking up weird vegetable:)

What's this?

ROBYN. That's goya.

SHARON. What-now?

ROBYN. Goya. It's a vegetable.

A bitter gourd.

SHARON. Okay! yes. yes. Wow. Well. I see I am going to learn a lot from having you as a roommate.

(She laughs. ROBYN doesn't really.)

(Beat.)

You must be tired. Driving all the way from...New York?

ROBYN. The Bronx.

SHARON. The -! The Bronx!

ROBYN. Took about two days, by car.

SHARON. I thought...

ROBYN. What?

SHARON. I don't know,

When you said New York, I thought

somewhere Upstate

I didn't think...

Isn't The Bronx...

dangerous?

ROBYN. "Dangerous."

SHARON. And you're - I mean. You're a woman.

I mean. I don't know.

I've never lived in New York.

ROBYN. It's OK. I mean. There's parts. Parts where you don't wanna

late at night, you don't wanna

but it's fine. I stayed there for a little while and nothing ever

SHARON. (*With relief.*) Oh you aren't *from* the Bronx!

(*A slight pause.*)

ROBYN. Everywhere has parts like that.

SHARON. Oh it's mostly pretty safe here.

Except for the tornados.

ROBYN. (*Alarmed.*) Tornados??

SHARON. In the spring mostly

early summer

you just go on down to the basement til they pass. It's fine.

ROBYN. (*Even more alarmed.*) There are a lot of tornados here?

SHARON. Not as bad as some places.

ROBYN. Like how many tornados would you say, on average?

SHARON. It's fine! If you hear that big old siren

you just go down to the basement.

Really

it's no scarier than the Bronx.

ROBYN. (*Has to smile.*) I guess not if you're from here.

SHARON. (*Immediately.*) I'm not *from* here. You know. I'm not *Iowan*.

ROBYN. Oh OK

SHARON. I don't know if I said that?

when we talked on the phone, if I said that?

ROBYN. I don't think so, but it doesn't really

SHARON. I'm from Illinois, originally.

ROBYN. Oh!

SHARON. It's actually quite different from Iowa.

ROBYN. I'll take your word for it.

(Beat.)

SHARON. My son lives in New York.

ROBYN. Oh!

You have a son?

SHARON. I do, he lives in New York.

ROBYN. That's great. In the Bronx?

SHARON. No! No no

He lives

"Park Slope" do you know where [that is?]

He lives in "Park Slope."

ROBYN. Oh yeah, that's great.

SHARON. He pays way too much for [rent]

I tell him that all the time, I say

In Iowa you could have a *house* for the money you
spend on [rent]

(Laughs a little, stops.)

He doesn't like it when I say that.

He didn't like Iowa.

ROBYN. The tornados?

SHARON. No he just didn't like it.

(Beat. Have they run out of conversation?)

SHARON *hastens.*)

He's a designer.

ROBYN. Oh! That's great!

SHARON. He's very good, everybody thinks he's very good.

ROBYN. What does he design?

SHARON. *(Doesn't really know.)* Clothes, he mostly designs clothes. For women?

ROBYN. Oh!

SHARON. Everybody thinks he's a homosexual, but he's not.

(Where did this come from?? SHARON has surprised herself. A beat.)

ROBYN. I'm gay.

SHARON. Oh!

You're -?

Oh!!

You're -??

(Beat.)

I mean, I don't have any problem with homosexuals.

ROBYN. Oh good.

SHARON. Nope. Not at all. I think, you know, gay rights!
Let them marry!

ROBYN. Thank you.

SHARON. Some of my son's friends are homosexual people.
Probably most of them.

ROBYN. Oh.

SHARON. I think most New Yorkers are.

ROBYN. I think actually there are a lot of straight people in New York.

SHARON. I kissed a girl once in college.

(Beat.)

I'm sorry. I'm nervous.

ROBYN. Why are you nervous?

SHARON. I mean. A roommate! I've never had a roommate.

(This is an admission of failure:)

I'm sixty-five years old.

A roommate!

ROBYN. It's OK. You'll save money.

SHARON. No, I know! I know. I definitely

I will definitely save money.

(Beat.)

You – did you have a lot more boxes in the car?

ROBYN. I've got it.

SHARON. *(Really doesn't want to keep carrying boxes.)*
Well if you're sure.

ROBYN. Be right back.

(She exits back out to the car.)

(SHARON sits alone in her kitchen with all these new weird vegetables. She takes a deep breath. OK. It's OK.)

SHARON. *(Calling after her.)* Today is my reading group!

ROBYN. *(Offstage.)* What did you say?

SHARON. Oh, I said: today is my reading group.

If you want to come with me.

(ROBYN returns. She's carrying a heavy box.)

ROBYN. Your "reading group"?

SHARON. You know, a book club. Only Tanya calls it a reading group –

(She jumps up to help ROBYN set the box on the table. ROBYN pulls away.)

ROBYN. I've got it!

SHARON. – Tanya's the one who runs it, she says everything just a little bit wrong, it's because she's from Idaho and there wasn't any culture there, so she didn't get exposed to things until much later in life.

(Beat.)

Is that more vegetables?

ROBYN. No that goes upstairs.

A reading group...

(Beat.)

Isn't that. Kind of. For old people?

SHARON. *(Amazed.)* We are old people.

ROBYN. *(Amazed.)* We are?

(A beat. They study each other.)

(Each is kind of baffled by the other.)

(Then ROBYN turns away.)

I'll just take this upstairs. But thanks for the invitation.

SHARON. You're so welcome. You let me know if there's anything you need.

Mi casa es su casa!

(Beat.)

Literally.

ROBYN. OK then.

(She picks up the box and almost drops it.)

(A ceramic doll falls out and smashes.)

(The box is full of ceramic dolls.)

SHARON. Oh no!

ROBYN. Stay there!

(ROBYN moves quickly between SHARON and the shards.)

SHARON. Are you OK? Do you need help?

ROBYN. *(Sharp.)* I've got this!

Is there a [broom]?

SHARON. Here...

(Gets her a broom.)

Do you want me to...?

ROBYN. No no

I've got it.

(As she sweeps - calmer.)

Sorry. I didn't mean to [snap]

I just didn't want you to get cut.

SHARON. (*Peering into the box.*) What...are all these dolls?

ROBYN. Please!!

(**SHARON** moves away from the box.)

Sorry. They're – it's personal.

SHARON. I didn't mean to pry.

ROBYN. I made them. I used to be a potter.

SHARON. You were?

ROBYN. They're patterned after these antique South American dolls.

SHARON. Oh! Wow

ROBYN. But then I stopped. So.

It's a little embarrassing.

SHARON. You shouldn't be embarrassed, they're very

(*She doesn't like them.*)

Evocative.

ROBYN. *Evocative?*

SHARON. They evoke things.

ROBYN. They're actually voodoo dolls.

SHARON. Voodoo??

ROBYN. Kidding.

SHARON. I mean I don't know

They look a little voodoo-y to me.

ROBYN. Maybe they *evoke* voodoo.

(*A beat. They share a smile.*)

SHARON. I didn't mean that in a bad way.

ROBYN. It's OK. I'm done with all that.

SHARON. Why did you stop?

ROBYN. I stopped because

uh

it wasn't the sort of lifestyle

that...

Being a potter can be very

stressful.

(Beat.)

SHARON. Your boxes are so heavy and you just got here.

Leave them on the porch and put your feet up.

I'll get us coffee.

ROBYN. Is your porch safe?

SHARON. Safe?

ROBYN. Break-ins?

SHARON. This is Iowa.

ROBYN. Yes?

SHARON. No break-ins.

ROBYN. But you lock the doors?

SHARON. I *can* lock the doors.

If that makes you feel comfortable, I can *start* locking the doors.

ROBYN. I feel better with things. Locked.

SHARON. A New York thing?

ROBYN. Sure.

SHARON. A Bronx thing?

ROBYN. A Robyn thing.

(Re: the doll box.)

I'll just take this up to my room...

SHARON. Oh! just up the stairs

immediate left –

would you like me to show you?

ROBYN. I've got it.

Here we go, take two.

(She hoists the box with the dolls and exits upstairs.)

2.

(Morning. Kitchen.)

(SHARON on the phone with her son.)

SHARON. *(Excited, sotto voce.)* And here's the other thing!

She's a homosexual!

(Beat.)

Well I don't care OF COURSE, but you asked if anything interesting happened, and I thought that was interesting.

(Beat.)

Also she used to be a potter
she said she made voodoo dolls but
she was just joshing me.

(Beat.)

When are you going to come visit?

(Beat - he's too busy.)

No...I know...of course, yes...

No, forget it, maybe later.

(Beat.)

Maybe I should come visit you.

(Beat - he's trying to get out of this.)

We always have such fun when I visit you! I love staying with you, your roommate is so lovely, the tall one, what's his name... Do you know what he did last time, he did the funniest thing, did I tell you this? He was -

(Beat – her son is saying that she has told him this so many times.)

SHARON. Oh. Oh yes. I guess I did, didn't I.

(Beat.)

She's joined a...local farm. And she just got here yesterday! She just picked up a box of vegetables on her way here. I mean that's very healthy, she seems very healthy. And she just bought a folding bicycle, like a... like sort of a folding chair, but it's a bicycle.

(Her son isn't as impressed as she is.)

Anyway, she seems like a very healthy person with a very sort of *healthy* lifestyle, and I just think this is all going to just be very healthy for me.

(ROBYN wanders in. She's smoking.)

(SHARON coughs. She coughs pointedly.)

(ROBYN glances at her.)

ROBYN. Oh! Sorry!

(SHARON coughs and fans the air.)

Sorry!

(ROBYN goes out onto the porch and chain-smokes. Back to the phone:)

SHARON. *(Intense whisper.)* SHE. IS. SMOKING.

(Beat.)

Well I thought I was fairly clear about that when I said I was looking for a woman of a certain age!

(Beat.)

Are you LAUGHING at me?

(Beat.)

I have to go.

(Beat – he’s apologizing but she won’t be mollified.)

No, no it’s OK. I have to go. I know how busy you are.

(She hangs up.)

(A beat.)

(ROBYN comes back in.)

ROBYN. Morning.

SHARON. Good morning.

(Beat.)

ROBYN. Sorry about that.

SHARON. I didn’t know you smoked.

ROBYN. I quit. I’m quitting. I quit.

SHARON. Oh.

ROBYN. I quit right before I moved. So.

SHARON. Oh.

ROBYN. New places stress me out.

SHARON. You weren’t stressed out in The Bronx but you’re stressed out in Iowa?

ROBYN. I *was* stressed out in the Bronx, which is why I smoked there.

And I am stressed out in Iowa, which is why I just smoked here.

Even though I quit.

I am re-quitting.

SHARON. They have nicotine gum at the gas station.

They didn't used to, but now it's become popular.

ROBYN. The gum is no good, I get hooked on the gum.

I just need to quit cold turkey.

Everything that I do, I just need to DO it, no half-measures. Just jump.

SHARON. (*Impressed despite herself.*) Like moving to Iowa?

ROBYN. Like moving to Iowa.

(A warmer beat between the women: a shared humor.)

SHARON. Do you want some eggs? I was gonna make eggs.

ROBYN. I can't, but thanks.

SHARON. You -?

Oh!

Vegan!

ROBYN. Vegan.

SHARON. Vegan.

Coffee? Without milk?

ROBYN. I'd love some coffee. With almond milk.

SHARON. I don't have almond milk.

ROBYN. I got it from the co-op yesterday.

You can try it.

(She gets out the almond milk.)

(SHARON thinks it's very strange, but:)

SHARON. (*Very determined.*) OK yes.

Yes, I will.

*(She lets **ROBYN** put almond milk in her coffee. They drink coffee together.)*

It's...

ROBYN. Weird?

SHARON. Weird.

ROBYN. Bad?

SHARON. Not bad.

(Beat.)

(The warmth between them becomes awkward again.)

So what do you do?

ROBYN. Me?

SHARON. Uh. You.

ROBYN. Well. I do a lot of things.

*(**SHARON** waits. **ROBYN** drinks more almond milk coffee.)*

SHARON. Oh.

Well.

Like what do you do?

For example.

ROBYN. Well.

(Beat.)

I'm a poet.

SHARON. A poet!

ROBYN. Yes, I write poetry.

(Beat.)

SHARON. That's great!

I love poetry!

(Beat - honest.)

I don't really understand poetry.

ROBYN. I write slam poetry.

SHARON. I don't know what that is.

ROBYN. I write poems and then I perform them.

SHARON. And what do you write...about?

(A pause.)

ROBYN. I do other things too.

SHARON. Oh?

ROBYN. I grow things. I like to grow things.

SHARON. I never had much of a green thumb but

that's wonderful!

What do you grow?

(A pause.)

ROBYN. What do you do?

SHARON. *(Completely off-balanced.)* Me?

I mean.

I live here. Obviously.

ROBYN. Yeah...

SHARON. I'm a mother...

ROBYN. Right.

SHARON. I'm retired!

ROBYN. From what?

(Beat.)

SHARON. My marriage.

ROBYN. *Oh.*

SHARON. Yeah. So.

ROBYN. I'm sorry?

SHARON. Don't be.

ROBYN. Then I'm not.

(Beat, ROBYN smiles, then SHARON does.)

(A shared moment.)

SHARON. I'd love to hear some of your poems.

ROBYN. Oh. I don't think so.

SHARON. Maybe you could explain them to me.

ROBYN. Poetry can't really...be explained.

SHARON. That's probably why I don't like it.

Oh! Sorry! I didn't mean...

ROBYN. No. No no. It's OK.

I don't like poetry either.

SHARON. You don't?

ROBYN. I like mine. But I don't have a lot of patience for other people's.

SHARON. I think I feel that way about children.

ROBYN. I think I feel that way about most things.

(Another shared smile. Beat.)

SHARON. So...why Iowa?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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