

Acting Edition

QUEENS

BY **MARTYNA MAJOK**

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This newly imagined version of *QUEENS* was commissioned by the Hermitage Greenfield Prize (The Hermitage Artist Retreat, Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer) and co-commissioned by the Almeida Theatre (Rupert Goold, Artistic Director; Denise Wood, Executive Director) and Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) through the Edgerton Foundation New Play commission program. It was produced by Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City on October 15, 2025. The production was directed by Trip Cullman, with scenic design by Marsha Ginsberg; costume design by Sarah Laux; lighting design by Ben Stanton; wig, hair, and makeup design by J. Jared Janas; and original music and sound design by Mikael Sulaiman. The dialect coach was Jane Guyer Fujita, the fight choreographer was Rocío Mendez, the stage manager was Bianca Mercado-Boller, and the production stage manager was Katie Ailing. The cast was as follows:

RENIA	Marin Ireland
INNA	Julia Lester
PELAGIYA	Brooke Bloom
AAMANI	Nadine Malouf
ISABELA	Nicole Villamil
AGATA	Anna Chlumsky
LERA	Andrea Syglowski
GLENYS	Sharlene Cruz

QUEENS was developed during a residency at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference (Preston Whiteway, Executive Director; Wendy C. Goldberg, Artistic Director) in 2017. It was developed with the support of the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in Berkeley, California, and the Lark in New York City. *QUEENS* was produced by Lincoln Center Theater in New York City in 2018.

CHARACTERS

RENIA – Female. Polish.

INNA – Female. Ukrainian.

PELAGIYA – Female. Belarusian.

AAMANI – Female. Afghan.

ISABELA – Female. Honduran.

AGATA – Female. Polish.

LERA – Female. Ukrainian.

GLENYS – Female. Honduran American.

PLACE

Primarily, one summer night in a subdivided basement apartment in Queens, which hosts memories of the past.

2001–2017.

Specifically, three months after 9/11 into the first summer of the first Trump administration.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Dialogistics

Slashes // indicate overlap.

Ellipses ... are active silences.

Different characters' dialogue on the same line indicates simultaneous speech.

<< *text like this* >> contains English translations of other languages.

[*text like this*] indicates pronunciations.

Some Notes on Performance

Self-pity has little currency in these characters' worlds. Humor, however, has much. For to dwell is to sink in all of it. People will say what's what and feel everything deeply but they know not to expect anyone to fix it.

No one is a caricature and everyone has dignity. All of these characters' collections of languages have mixed and melded into something new and individual. There is drama, conflict, and active invention in trying to reach others and make meaning from limited means.

for the women who have held me

“ja ciebie mocniej”
<< *i [love] you more* >>

– Justyna Depczyńska, text message

Prologue

*(An early evening of a New York summer. 2017.
The faded brick facade of a modest three- or four-
story home in a working-class neighborhood of
Queens.)*

*A woman, **RENIA**, late forties or older, carrying
groceries.*

*A young woman gets in her face. **INNA**, young,
twenties.*

*She has a pulsing, feral fury and hasn't
washed in a week.*

*Both women have Slavic dialects. Different
ones.)*

INNA. Hey!

Ви власниця цього будинку?

[Vy vlasnytsia tsoho budynku?]

<< You the owner of this house? >>

...

RENIA. What.

INNA. Ви власниця цього будинку?

[Vy vlasnytsia tsoho budynku?]

<< You the owner of this house? >>

RENIA. *(moving away)* I don't speak this.

INNA. You the lady of the house?

RENIA. *(stops)* Me?

INNA. You.

The lady.

This house.

RENIA. ...Maybe.

INNA. You live here? This building?

RENIA. Why.

INNA. Nice building.

You like here? In Queens? This building?

RENIA. Why.

INNA. You got good service? Phone service? Good heat?

RENIA. *(leaving)* // Okay.

INNA. Heat good? You got regrets?

RENIA. ...

INNA. Any regrets? In your life?

In this building?

You leave your country When you are young You leave
your family You make life here, new life, send some
money For a while Back home But not *so* while Just
like, little while maybe Then you disappear No one
hears from you twenty years You got a daughter?

You got a daughter?

You got a -?

RENIA. Maybe.

(INNA punches her.

A skilled punch.

Swift.)

(INNA watches RENIA hold her face.

They lock eyes. Two animals.)

INNA. You got a room here I can rent?

ACT ONE

(A basement apartment in Queens. The common area. RENIA and INNA.

*We are moments after their first encounter.
RENIA's face has a shiner. She holds her jaw.)*

*(RENIA shows INNA the place.
It is underwhelming – even to someone who
has come to expect less, consistently.)*

RENIA. Your room. For rent.

Ta-da.

Queens. 2017.

*(INNA can see the whole apartment without
moving her head. RENIA points to a room.)*

I have few like this down here. But this it's most nice one. Most windows from all of them. See? Two.

INNA. How much?

RENIA. Fifty.

INNA. That's it?

RENIA. Each night.

INNA. Dollars?

RENIA. No, hold on. Sixty.

INNA. What? Why?

(She figures out why.)

INNA. Yeah okay. I am sorry your face.

RENIA. Yeah.

INNA. I should ask your name before I // punch –

RENIA. Yes you should.

INNA. You just you sound so much like –

RENIA. Many people sound like me here.

INNA. – and we don't look so much different, you and me,
so I think –

RENIA. Don't do this in Queens. Okay?

Don't do this this country.

That's whole my advice I have for you. For your – time
here.

Don't punch women with accents.

INNA. Sorry. Okay. Already I say. Very. I am very sorry.

RENIA. It is not okay but I will take your money.

You punch me again then it's gonna be problems.

For now, it's One Strike.

INNA. Thank you.

RENIA. Because I will fuck you up.

INNA. Okay.

RENIA. (*'don't fuck with me'*) Okay?

INNA. Okay.

RENIA. (*back to business*) Okay so –

INNA. How you would fuck me up.

RENIA. What.

INNA. I just wanna know how you think *you* would fuck
me up. So I can make my choices good. You know? So
I know what might happen to me.

RENIA. (*'interesting'*) Okay.

INNA. (*that's right*) Okay. So –

RENIA. How she look like?

INNA. My –?

RENIA. Your – this face you wanna punch.

She sound like me?

INNA. I think so.

RENIA. You think so?

INNA. I don't remember.

RENIA. She leave you?

INNA. Young, yes.

RENIA. Where you come from?

...

INNA. (*knows it's not what she's asking*) Port Authority.

So what else is here?, bathroom?, where is?

(RENIA maybe smiles a moment, sensing a type of kinship in INNA's guardedness and attempts to seem strong. RENIA remains always in control but feels curious and drawn to this young woman. She upholds business for now.)

RENIA. Bathroom it's here. If you wanna wash, it's hose you can use. You connect this to sink, for washing. (*re: INNA's smell, appearance*) Which – you maybe wish to do this now. Please maybe do this now. Before you sleep on anything.

INNA. It's just me down here?

RENIA. Just you.

But things change every day. They could.

Was many people living this rooms here. Many people, over time. You maybe should wash this pillow, I don't know when it's last time Wash this pillow.

You plan to stay long?, this country?

INNA. Don't know. Depends.

RENIA. Well these days you better be sure. I dunno what news you read but. He did lotta great things already, not even one year president, and now all the bad countries can't even fly here. But you know, affects people like you too.

No cooking down here, okay?, but it's food places everywhere. All kinds food.

But be careful.

INNA. Careful what?

RENIA. First time I come this country, I never see this much kinds foods. I was living, you know, my country, in Limited Way so when I come here first time –

INNA. What I gotta be careful from here?

RENIA. You got some kind appointment?

INNA. What?

RENIA. Some Big Time appointment you got?

INNA. No.

RENIA. So hang on two fucking minutes I am telling you story.

There will be days here sometimes when no one speaks – or even looks – your face and then you will be wishing you let me talk.

...

INNA. (*'go ahead'*) Okay.

RENIA. You're welcome.

First time I come here, I never even see some this things. Chili pepper. Star fruit, fruit like star. Mango. Kiwi. All this colors. First time I see pineapple, I take home this in my bag, just for me, like some secret thing. Can you imagine, when whole your life, it's...gray to finally, in your mouth, to finally have... It almost burns

me, so sweet. I eat whole thing. Whole thing. All in one time. I could not stop. Can you imagine. If whole your life had so much Nevers. By the end, my mouth was full with blood. Acid. The fruit, you know. So my mouth. Full with blood.

Be careful.

Oh and keep windows closed. Mouse can fall inside.
Basement, y'know.
Animals fall inside.

INNA. Sixty it's...lotta money.

RENIA. Well New York it's lotta bullshit expensive.

INNA. Okay but no one would be here now.

RENIA. Anyone could be here now.

INNA. But no one is here.

RENIA. You are. You are here now. But okay sixty it's too much okay so see you later.

INNA. Okay, sixty.

RENIA. Cash.

INNA. I pay Friday.

RENIA. No. Security deposit, I need. Sixty now. For my security.

(A moment.

Then –

INNA *puts her hands down her pants.*

It takes a minute.

*It takes maybe like a few seconds longer than
you think it might take.*

She really digs in there.

Intricate business.

INNA *pulls out some wet cash.*

Holds it out to RENIA.

...

...

*She wipes the money on the thighs of her pants.
And holds it out again – slightly drier.)*

RENIA. Pay me Friday.

(RENIA moves to exit.)

INNA. You play?

RENIA. What?

*(INNA holds out a guitar she just found in the
space.*

RENIA *looks at an object with a history to it.)*

No.

If this bothers you, just throw outside someplace.

INNA. This? You can't throw this.

RENIA. People down here, they would leave things. They had to go fast or they can't take where they was going this things. People leave things. I don't even know what's down here you might find.

What you think was gonna happen?

INNA. What?

RENIA. You come this country, punch some women, then...?
It's something more to your Big Plan?

INNA. What you would do? If she came to you now?

...

RENIA. *(knows who)* Who?

INNA. Why you let me stay I punch you your face?

RENIA. ...

INNA. What is your name?

AAMANI & PELAGIYA. What is your name?

(A memory walks in.)

PELAGIYA. And what is your reason?

RENIA. What?

AAMANI. The reason you are here. Looking to live someplace away from the rest of your kind of people. What happened.

December 2001.

(AAMANI and PELAGIYA encircle RENIA, who is younger, more anxious.

The middle of an interrogation-like interview.)

(INNA has disappeared.)

RENIA. How much is rent?

PELAGIYA. Rent it's exact same number you hear. We don't mess up with people. And we don't want people mess up with us. So we want everything – rent *and* stories – Up Front.

RENIA. It's no story.

PELAGIYA. It's always story.

RENIA. I need place I can stay. I come here. End of story.

AAMANI. And where are you coming from?

RENIA. Where *you* coming from?

AAMANI. From my very warm room.

You know, there have been a lot of people coming looking now for place these past three months. They lose jobs. Lose lot of things since the towers. Lot of people like me, especially, are looking. So just so you know: There is competition.

PELAGIYA. Woman upstairs what owns this building, she says she don't care how many's living down here. Just – if we pay: Then, okay. Can be three, maybe even four people live here one time. Depends how we want to eh – // split –

AAMANI. Divide.

PELAGIYA. – yes, depends how much we wanna pay.

AAMANI. How *we* wish to live.

PELAGIYA. It's always good if we can save money, share this place. But we don't gonna say yes to someone what we don't know her story. These days, you don't know who people could be. So. From the top maybe, start. Okay? What happen.

RENIA. I am not what you maybe think I am.

AAMANI. Neither am I.

PELAGIYA. Or me.

RENIA. (*to PELAGIYA*) To prawda? To co mówicie?

[*To prawda? Toh tsoh movie-che?*]

<< *This is true? Everything you're saying?* >>

PELAGIYA. I don't speak this. I'm from Belarus.

AAMANI. But hey try me.

RENIA. (*still to PELAGIYA*) I never live with people not like me.

AAMANI. And how this worked out for you?

RENIA. It's not usual, this. To live with people not like you.

AAMANI. Maybe no but it is very good for learning English. To need help from people not like you.

PELAGIYA. (*not a good memory*) You learn English really fast then.

AAMANI. You don't have much stuff. Just this one bag you have with you?

RENIA. Just this bag.

AAMANI. You had to pack fast. No coat. This cold.

PELAGIYA. If you need clothes, things, we collect sometimes – clothes, things – for women what don't have time to pack.

AAMANI. People that stay here sometimes, they leave things. People leave things.

PELAGIYA. It's one shirt here what almost every woman sleep'd inside.

You plan to stay, this country? Or just – temporary?

RENIA. I...don't know.

So far it's not...best experience here, I don't know.

But it's something I have to decide.

Soon.

AAMANI. Well there are a few like this down here. But this room is the most nice one.

PELAGIYA. Most windows from all of them.

AAMANI. See?

AAMANI & PELAGIYA. Two.

(ISABELA enters from outside. An awkwardness washes over AAMANI and PELAGIYA. ISABELA surveys the scene. The new woman.)

ISABELA. I am still here.

PELAGIYA. We just prepare –

ISABELA. I pay. Whole week. So don't even think, okay?, cuz I pay for whole week. I don't leave 'til one week.

PELAGIYA. // Okay.

ISABELA. *(continued)* She stays here? Cuz then you better give me half my money, part my money, if she gonna stay here. *(to RENIA)* You. You the new one? You gonna stay here?

AAMANI. She just – **PELAGIYA.** We don't know yet she –

ISABELA. She have bag with her. All ready to go. (to **RENIA**)
You. HEY. You stay here?

RENIA. ...I maybe stay here, // yes, I don't know yet –

ISABELA. (to **AAMANI & PELAGIYA**) Then you better give
me my half my money, rest my money for this week.

AAMANI. Yeah okay, we will.

ISABELA. You fucking better.

(**ISABELA exits.**)

RENIA. Who is this?

AAMANI. Your roommate.

(*From off, a door slams – or a partition is
aggressively drawn.*)

Isabela.

PELAGIYA. And I'm Pelagiya.

Or Pela you can call me since no one can say it.

AAMANI. Aamani.

And you will call me Aamani.

PELAGIYA. (re: **ISABELA**) She leaves Sunday.

AAMANI. It's not been easy, past few months, for her.

Maybe, you know, we can do something nice.

Maybe Saturday.

PELAGIYA. Maybe.

AAMANI. Saturday.

...

PELAGIYA. (*'fine'*) Ugh.

(to **RENIA**) You free?

(RENIA looks at them both. And her new home.)

INNA, AAMANI & PELAGIYA. What is your name?

(We return to the present.)

(INNA has reappeared.)

RENIA. I am not what you maybe think I am.

INNA. I know.

RENIA. No. You don't.

(The past walks out.)

You don't know what life can be here.

In America.

Just before you go punching women.

(RENIA exits.)

*(INNA, alone, takes in a strange new place
far from anything she knows
and that knows her.*

*The neighborhood sounds of nighttime Queens
filter through an open window.
A summer breeze and the feeling of ghosts.)*

*(INNA finds a long shirt amidst the belongings
of the basement.*

Something about it captivates her.)

(INNA takes the shirt...

...and moves to the bathroom to wash...

*...as the past reassembles itself around
her...*

RENIA, AAMANI, and ISABELA in the common
area of the basement.

ISABELA *sorts through clothes and belongings and packs.*

AAMANI *smokes peacefully off to the side, savoring her day's favorite, rationed-out pleasure of a single cigarette. RENIA holds a radio.)*

RENIA. (*re: radio*) You want happy or sad?

ISABELA. What.

RENIA. Music. For your party.
For going away.

(**ISABELA** looks at **RENIA**, suspicious.)

ISABELA. I take everything with me. (*re: her pile of clothes*)
So don't think you gonna do shopping here tonight, okay? Maybe some people they would leave something. Not me. People always think they only gonna be here one year, no more. Save money, send money, don't buy, work work. But they make life here over time by mistake. You think you got nothing, then is time to go and you can't even see the floor.

(**AAMANI** holds up a tissue box.)

AAMANI. This also?

ISABELA. I take it all.

RENIA. I don't want your stuff.

ISABELA. You think I got ugly stuff?

RENIA. No –

ISABELA. Just my room you want, not my stuff.
(*to AAMANI*) She's not gonna be so good like me. Watch.

(**ISABELA** stuffs the tissue box into her suitcase.)

I don't need no party. Don't need music. You people don't know me.

RENIA. I know you. One week almost.

ISABELA. No you fucking don't. What you think you know about me? I talk to you?

We sleep in the same four walls – that's it – what you think you know? I don't come to this country for so you people can know me.

(ISABELA holds up a shirt. She speaks as if to herself. But knows the women listen.)

This. This cost me maybe...eight dollars. And tax. It's not even cute. Eight dollars and tax. That's almost two hours working. You know what I would love to do with two hours my time? How much I would love to trade this for to get back two hours my life? All this clothes I wear, this shoes, is probably like, whole day of working. This whole room is like half year working. One half year of my daughter's life...that I'm not with her...is here on the floor.

Everything goes.

PELAGIYA. *(entering)* Okay everybody owes me money.

(PELAGIYA carries in shopping bags full of stuff. Shakes snow off of herself. She walks in with an anxious but in charge energy. Needs to always be doing something.)

AAMANI. You're home?

ISABELA. What money? You wanna charge me my own party?

PELAGIYA. You say you don't want party.

ISABELA. Everybody all week keeps talking about party!

PELAGIYA. Yeah but you don't want one.

ISABELA. *(re: bags)* So what's this?

PELAGIYA. This is shopping.

ISABELA. If you use any this stuff my party, then I don't gotta pay.

PELAGIYA. It's no party.

ISABELA. (*re: RENIA*) So what's this one over here talking about? Moment she comes home she ask me what kind music I want, // what kind food –

RENIA. I make myself free.

ISABELA. (*continued*) All for some fucking party.

PELAGIYA. We ask you you want party you say no All week it's how garbage you think is party how waste So okay So why we gonna spend money if you don't want Is just shopping for –

ISABELA. (*sudden, desperate need*) This is the last time you gonna see me!!!

(A moment of silent panic.

Then – mobilized!

AAMANI holds out a cigarette for **ISABELA.**

PELAGIYA takes a beer out of her shopping bag and holds it out for **ISABELA.**

And RENIA, with nothing really to offer,

digs in her pockets,

pulls out a lighter,

holds it out for ISABELA.

And lights it.

A moment.

Then –)

(to RENIA and radio) You can play mix.

RENIA. ...

ISABELA. Happy.

And sad.

PELAGIYA. (*re: shopping*) Lemme put this stuff away then I'm gonna see what we got.

Almost two years I'm this place and I never do party so it's – you know – We don't exactly have system. I can go out maybe, fast. Get some chips.

(*She sees ISABELA still packing.*)

You know you can leave whatever you can't fit. Sweaters. Coats. Things like that what you not gonna need where you going.

ISABELA. I know.

PELAGIYA. You're not gonna fit all that.

(*ISABELA folds her clothes.*)

Least you don't gotta pay for shopping this week.
And your beer can be free. *Salud.*

ISABELA. *Spasiba.*

PELAGIYA. *De nada.* Even though you owe me months of milk.

ISABELA. What milk?

AAMANI. She was marking it.

ISABELA. What?

AAMANI. With marker. Every time she makes for herself cereal or something, coffee, she marks the level of the milk. On the box. So she knows if you drink her milk.

PELAGIYA. How you know?

AAMANI. Because I drink your milk.

(*AAMANI takes a beer. PELAGIYA notices.*)

I'm gonna pay you.

PELAGIYA. You rich now?

AAMANI. I can pay for one beer.

PELAGIYA. Fine. Here.

(PELAGIYA sets out beer.)

My contribution. To the party. You're welcome, everybody. But hey *(re: shopping)* it's ten dollars and twenty-six cents for the rest. Each. Ten dollars. And twenty-six cents. Don't forget to leave for me money. *(tries to catch RENIA off guard)* How much?

RENIA. Ten dollars and twenty-six cents. I hear you.

ISABELA. You know I'm not paying right?

PELAGIYA. We know.

AAMANI. What are you – why you cleaning now?

PELAGIYA. Look at this place.

AAMANI. Leave this.

PELAGIYA. Maybe you wanna help me.

AAMANI. I'm busy. In a party.

PELAGIYA. I can't look at this place like this. I have to do something. The restaurant sends me home because this stupid snow. And ever since September, it's like no customers, nobody goes out. I can't remember last time I have night off, I don't know what to do with my hands.

(PELAGIYA tries to make this happen out of earshot of ISABELA.)

I didn't think we was gonna do nothing or I would go get stuff.

We don't have nothing.

AAMANI. We have stuff.

PELAGIYA. Some bread, beer. Milk.

Soap.

What kinda party's that?

AAMANI. Five years from today, ten, twenty, we are not gonna remember if this place was clean or what we were eating –

PELAGIYA. We gonna remember what we were eating.

AAMANI. What she will remember is who was here. If this was my situation – If I had to, like she – I would want someone to do some kind of...something. This woman is leaving a world tomorrow. And we are the last people here she may see – ever.

PELAGIYA. We never did party for nobody.

AAMANI. Look at her.

(They look over at ISABELA, who seems lost in her task.)

Maybe a party would be good.

(re: 9/11) For all of us right now.

(PELAGIYA considers. Then –)

PELAGIYA. *(to RENIA)* Hey you. When you gonna leave this place, you tell me clear if you want party or no. So I can plan. So I can – *If* we like you by then – collect money, you know, *early*.

ISABELA. *(drowning in her own world)* i moved through this country my child moved through me then i moved through this country for my child things is always moving i'm always moving how i'm always moving... i wanna sit one day.

(They all look at ISABELA, descending, in a sea of her belongings. Overwhelmed. Oh no.)

AAMANI.

Someone give her a shot. Make her drink something.

PELAGIYA.

This is worst fucking party.

RENIA.

would help if we could play some music.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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