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For my husband, Lou

Cast of Characters

THE WOMAN IN BLACK, White. Middle-aged. WASP. Something aristocratic about her, an educated woman, although she is slightly unkempt, something ajar. Faded black taffeta, dressy raincoat with ruffle around collar and down the front. Gray straggly hair. Hat with feather or flower. Torn suede pumps. Carries some kind of small dress bag. A slight limp.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE, Black. 35ish. Well-dressed. Attractive. New York sophisticated woman. Extremely kempt. Hair, nails perfect. White designer trench coat. White Dior-type scarf with print around her neck.

The women somehow bear a strange resemblance to each other in some way.

Production Notes

I've designated one black and one white actress for the two roles. However, I feel the play would work equally well with other ethnic/racial combinations: one black, one Asian; one white, one Asian, two white, two black, one Latino, one white, one Latino, one black, etc., etc. Characters should be called and dressed in color that signifies ethnicity—but opposite of the expectation.

Acknowledgments

Railing It Uptown was produced by Primary Stages in The New York Project, October 1995, with the following cast and staff:

THE WOMAN IN BLACK..... Marilyn Rockafellow

THE WOMAN IN WHITE..... Nicole Quinn

Director Andrew Leynse

RAILING IT UPTOWN

by Shirley Lauro

(In black. Lights up. Glaring, harsh fluorescent. Black velours. Center stage, raked a little left, a two-seat subway unit with window on one side and pole flanking outside seat. Subway double-door unit, open, stage right. A single-door unit to next car, closed, stage left. WOMAN IN BLACK discovered in outside seat. WOMAN IN WHITE enters through double door unit. She carries Macy's shopping bags. She sees empty seat, slides past WOMAN IN BLACK, sits in inside seat, putting bags at her feet. Double doors shut. SOUND [slightly abstracted, surreal] of subway starting, roaring down track.

(A pause.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. I get off at 42nd St.

(WOMAN IN WHITE startled, looks at WOMAN IN BLACK.)

You jumped! Like I was assaulting you!

WOMAN IN WHITE. No!

(She laughs a little.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. Yes, you did!

WOMAN IN WHITE. Well—I—

WOMAN IN BLACK. I was just giving you this information

WOMAN IN WHITE. Yes?

WOMAN IN BLACK. You might not want to sit there

WOMAN IN WHITE. Why not?

WOMAN IN BLACK. You have all those shopping bags and I am getting off next stop.

WOMAN IN WHITE. I don't understand

WOMAN IN BLACK. I meant so you won't have to stand up for me

WOMAN IN WHITE. But I'm on the inside

WOMAN IN BLACK. Of what?

WOMAN IN WHITE. I don't have to stand up for you is what I mean.

WOMAN IN BLACK. Unless you decide to

WOMAN IN WHITE. But whyever would I do that?

(WHITE looks at BLACK, then away. Another pause.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. This was not an assault of any kind!

WOMAN IN WHITE. I don't think I implied it was

WOMAN IN BLACK. Interesting comment on the times though, isn't it?

WOMAN IN WHITE. What?

WOMAN IN BLACK. Trying to be nice, considerate, thoughtful—and it's taken as an assault?

WOMAN IN WHITE. Look, I really and truly am sorry. You just took me a little by surprise is all. And I startled. That's all it was.

WOMAN IN BLACK. I was speaking for your own good.

WOMAN IN WHITE. Of course.

(Another pause.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. Got a lot of bargains in those bags?

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Chuckling:)* Matter of fact I do...

WOMAN IN BLACK. *(As if a circus barker:)* "Bankrupt Bargains from Macy's of Herald Square"

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Smiling only slightly:)* Uh... right... right.

WOMAN IN BLACK. Towels? ...Lap robe?...Warm...woolly... underwear?

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Hesitantly, subtly shoving bags a little away from WOMAN IN BLACK's feet.)* Well—towels—

WOMAN IN BLACK. White?... Thick?... Soft?... CLEAN?

WOMAN IN WHITE. Yes, of course they're clean—they're new...

(Another pause, a little more awkward than ones before. WHITE pushes bags farther away.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. And what kind of time do you have?

(WOMAN IN WHITE puzzled, then looks at watch.)

WOMAN IN WHITE. 12:52...

WOMAN IN BLACK. Seiko?

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Sliding sleeve over watch.)* Yes...

WOMAN IN BLACK. Perfect, isn't it?

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Putting hand with watch in pocket.)* My watch?

WOMAN IN BLACK. The time. For a one o'clock luncheon I mean. I *always* have a one o'clock luncheon. When I can.

(Train screeches to a stop.)

Oh! We're here!

(She jumps up, announcing like conductor:)

“FORTY-SECOND STREET!”

(Turns to WHITE.)

You out to lunch too?

(She starts into aisle, limping.)

Come on!

(She does a little tap shuffle, singing:)

“Let's beat our feet, on forty-second street!”

(She turns to WHITE.)

WOMAN IN WHITE. No. I'm not out to lunch...

WOMAN IN BLACK. No?

WOMAN IN WHITE. No.

WOMAN IN BLACK. Then why should I be?

(She sits back down.)

WOMAN IN WHITE. I rarely ride the subway at all, actually. But I couldn't get a cab. And I'm very late!

WOMAN IN BLACK. *(Singing:)* "For a very important date?"

WOMAN IN WHITE. No. Just late.

WOMAN IN BLACK. Terrible neighborhood besides! Right?

(SOUND of train starting. Pause. WOMAN IN BLACK looks around.)

Nobody else seems worried about it though. They all got off. Now we're in here solo! Express!

(Slowly, uneasily, WOMAN IN WHITE starts looking around.)

WOMAN IN WHITE. I—I see—

(Pause.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. So where *do* you get off?

WOMAN IN WHITE. Uh—next stop—

WOMAN IN BLACK. 59th? Then I will too. Know a good café up there?

WOMAN IN WHITE. No!...Uh, no...I don't...

WOMAN IN BLACK. Nothing? You never eat out up there?

WOMAN IN WHITE. Look, do you mind? I have a headache.

(Turns away, resting head in hand.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. You're gong to eat home then? Your apartment? With your husband? You have a husband don't you? You look like you do.

WOMAN IN WHITE. Listen, I don't care to have a conversation just now, all right? As I said, I have this headache.

(She shifts farther away, looks out window.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. Like I was assaulting you again!

(WOMAN IN WHITE *getting idea: takes book from purse starts to read.*)

I... I just want to read my book.

(*Pause.*)

WOMAN IN BLACK. You live on 59th street?

WOMAN IN WHITE. Will you *let me alone?*

WOMAN IN BLACK. Okay. Okay. I just asked a question. What's wrong with you anyway?

WOMAN IN WHITE. NOTHING is wrong with me! Except I have a headache. And I want to read my book.

WOMAN IN BLACK. And you don't want to talk to me!

WOMAN IN WHITE. That right! I don't!

WOMAN IN BLACK. Because I'm a stranger?

WOMAN IN WHITE. No—

WOMAN IN BLACK. You're afraid to tell me where you live.

WOMAN IN WHITE. I told you where I live.

WOMAN IN BLACK. You told me your subway stop. The rest is confidential right? Your address, your husband? Your kids? You have some don't you? Teenagers—thirteen-fourteen would be their age? I imagine you with kids and a husband—everybody together at home with you—

WOMAN IN WHITE. Will you *stop* this?

WOMAN IN BLACK. Because I don't seem right in the head?

WOMAN IN WHITE. I didn't say that!

WOMAN IN BLACK. It's what you were thinking though. I'll give you an example:

WOMAN IN WHITE. That's it: let me out!

(WOMAN IN WHITE *suddenly stands up.*)

Just LET ME OUT OF HERE!

(She tries to shove past BLACK but BLACK now jumps up too, blocking WHITE.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. I stood up recently. On the “C” train. And I suddenly just started

(Screaming:)

SCREAMING!

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Blanching:)* Oh no! Here we go—

(WOMAN IN BLACK steps into aisle.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. And the woman next to me said: “You’re CRAZY! YOU ARE CRAZY IN YOUR HEAD!” And I said: “The truth of the matter is:”

(She address WHITE confidentially:)

“I am hemorrhaging inside. There is blood running down my legs! GET ME TO A HOSPITAL LADY! GET ME TO A DOCTOR!”

(She takes a step into aisle, then like waitress calling order:)

“AND ONE CUP HOT SOUP! BREAD! BUTTER! WHISKEY DOWN!”

(WOMAN IN WHITE now bolts past her, into aisle, backing away, BLACK in pursuit.)

“I AM HEMORRHAGING INSIDE!”

(WOMAN IN WHITE backs up against double doors of subway, BLACK pinning her there, hands on each side of door, growing confidential again:)

“You’re crazy!” The woman on the “C” train said to me as all the blood ran down my leg!

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Whispering:)* You are crazy!

WOMAN IN BLACK. *(Whispering too:)* “Help!” said the woman next to me.

WOMAN IN WHITE. (*Whispering, looking around from corners of her eyes:*) Help—help—!

(She tries to duck out of BLACK's control but BLACK blocks her. She tries to duck other way, BLACK blocks her.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. “Stop trying to run out!” I said. “Can’t you see I am hemorrhaging inside? Can’t you see *I* need help?” that’s what I said to her.

WOMAN IN WHITE. HELP!! HELP!!

(She tries desperately to open the double doors.)

WOMAN IN BLACK. (*Calm, whispering in WHITE's ear:*) “Stop that!” I said. “Those doors could fly open and you’d be killed!”

(WOMAN IN WHITE suddenly turns, shoves BLACK, knocking her backwards, running to exit door to next car, trying to open it. BLACK stumbles, gets up, runs to WHITE, grabs her, pinning her against door by her shoulders, stopping her exit.)

A woman died last week!

WOMAN IN WHITE. (*Slumping, defeated against door, sobbing:*) Oh God... Oh God...

WOMAN IN BLACK. Not to worry! It’s *not* the woman I was telling you about!

(She grows compassionate, relaxing her grip.)

Don’t cry. A million differences between women besides. See, she got the door open and ran out. But that train had stopped. A local. Not like now. Besides that was days ago. And I really *was* hemorrhaging that day. Pouring blood at that time. But I didn’t mean her any harm... she was just scared I guess...

(A pause.)

You scared?

(Pause. WHITE nods slightly. BLACK comforting:)

Don’t be. We’re “A” not “C.” I keep telling you that. Why exaggerate, hallucinate, prevaricate, or hang gloom in *here*? There is nothing in the world to be afraid of. We are “A” for effort Express!

(She smiles warmly, takes step away from WHITE, then turns back, smiles again, goes toward seat, indicating it:)

Look, why don't you just sit down?

(WHITE looks at her, then at seat.)

Biting, spitting, defecating in public places, smelling to heaven—I don't do that. Or spreading rotten stuff like TB or AIDS. Or BIRD FLU! Or being nigger. Or anything antisocial in behavior like that. I'm not going to hurt you.

(She smiles at WHITE.)

Can't you see I'm harmless? Just a person—

(Smiles more broadly. WHITE is studying.)

Another woman... railing it... uptown...

(She now turns profile view, in posture reminiscent of WHITE, and poses for WHITE to appraise her. In spite of herself WHITE starts smiling. BLACK turns to her.)

Look—all I wanted was the name of a small café for lunch, right?

(WHITE nods.)

And then I wanted the time of day? And to warn you I'd be getting off so you wouldn't have to move those bags?

(WHITE nods.)

Not one bad thing has happened now has it?

(WHITE shrugs, shakes her head.)

Didn't harm you, molest you, steal from you, assault you in any way. Only touched you once: to stop you from getting hurt! True or false?

WOMAN IN WHITE. *(Hesitantly, very softly:)* True—I guess—

WOMAN IN BLACK. Of course true! So? Why stand there swaying in the breeze?

WOMAN IN WHITE. I—I don't know exactly—

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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