

TAMAR

Stand-alone monologue. Unpublished.

by Karen Hartman

In a Jerusalem apartment, Tamar, 20s, speaks to her sleeping lover.

TAMAR

I got here and Mitch took me to buy falafel like I'd never had falafel, and she took me to buy vegetables and to museums. There are not so many museums in Yerushalayim. You don't need museums because you're already here. We walked through a park called Independence, after Israel, and one called Liberty Bell, after America.

I might find purity here. The guys in black who Mitch says are mourning for the temple, it doesn't make any sense but it's a strong and pure gesture. It's hot here, and bright. Everywhere that isn't planted you see as desert. But that's not much of Jerusalem. They're irrigating like this was the garden of eden. I think it's dangerous. Desert climates should be allowed to offer what they can.

When school ended I didn't know what to do. I'm not a slacker by nature but this is my generation and my economy. No jobs for a sociology major, environmental studies minor out of UC Santa Cruz, unless you move to someplace like Idaho which I was not about to do. I was broke. I applied to summer camps, which was a joke because I never even went to summer camp, but I wound up in the office at a Jewish one. Which is also a joke because number one I'm not what you'd call a religious Jew or even a cultural Jew. I don't own Jewish jewelry and I don't call assholes shmucks and in my family you didn't eat lox on Sunday mornings, you got high. So it was what you'd call a random age 22 employment opportunity, maybe not so random if you believe in anything at all. Which I don't.

I do believe that I'm an administratively skilled person, which meant camp didn't run out of licorice or t-shirts and no one in the eight by eight office killed each other or yelled much at me. The thing is, summer camp isn't exactly designed to reward and praise office staff. You're supposed to bond with the children. I bonded with the camp nurse. It was a good summer but I was still unemployed by the end of it so when they asked me to go year-round I said sure. I thought San Francisco was a great city. Have you been to San Francisco?

Really ever since I figured out I was gay, in high school, maybe the only thing I figured out in high school or probably so far, I've wanted to live in San Francisco. So there it was. Me

and the Jewish community. Partners. In our office we'd get challah and drink grape juice on Friday afternoons and sing a little and go home an hour early. I had friends from camp in the bay area, people would invite me over and I'd go. None of us were religious, is the thing, but sometimes it's nice to say a few words you don't understand.

I am not living up to my potential as a person. In seventh grade we read Lord of the Flies which I still think is a brilliant book and we were supposed to write these essays and I didn't write it down and forgot and then my friend on the bus told me it was due that day so I wrote in on the bus and got an A-. Minus for handwriting. It was the beginning of me as a secret underachiever.

But then I had this roommate fresh year named Rebecca. Rebecca would get these freshman comp assignments and copy her ideas onto notecards and frame her desk with cards and recopy and color code and write drafts. Also Rebecca was maybe the single person in history to use the writing tutor. Living in one room with Rebecca was like scat singing against a waltz. I'd come home at maybe five from a girl's or a party or just a stupid conversation and at eight I'd hear Rebecca wake up and take a shower and watch her with one eye pulling a dress over her clean body and she would go to her classes which were the same as mine only I was sleeping through them. She'd go prepared and I'd see her at lunch when Rebecca would have a salad and I would be waking up and drinking coffee and smoking and eating something inappropriate. And then Rebecca would go tutor underprivileged children and I'd sit and worry about class. And then Rebecca would go jogging and I'd look at the notecards around her desk and smell her dresses and cry a little. We would have dinner. We were on the meal plan, but sometimes she would take me for frozen yogurt. Rebecca was from Palo Alto and got checks every month. After dinner Rebecca would sit at her desk with the notecards and work for five hours without stopping until her long-distance monogamous heterosexual relationship called at midnight and she would coo a little and then floss and go to bed and wake up all refreshed at eight. But by the phone call I was usually out of there.

I have done a lot of thinking about Rebecca, in case you hadn't noticed, and I have two conclusions. One: loving a straight person should be the biblical punishment for murder. Two: Rebecca may fall by many things, but she will not fall by her own lameness. That may be why she didn't mind that I wrote my papers the day they were due and got the same grades. She'd say Tamar if I had your mind there is nothing I'd be scared of. She'd say you will fly away one day and I will get to watch. She'd say the word has not been written to describe who you will be.

I sound like a myth talking this way, but the thing is I think it's true. Here was my disorganization joke that started in seventh grade -- if I kept track of my ideas they would explode the world, so be glad I lose everything. Ha ha.

I don't think that anymore. For some things it is too late and even though most people's IQs are supposed to go up by adulthood, which only shows the test is tweaked, I'm sure mine's gone down. You're an intelligent person so I won't make the connection to gender and expectations. I don't like to talk about gender and expectations, which explains why I didn't major in women's studies or even minor in it, which, being a dyke, you'd think I might have done.

I got a letter from Rebecca a year and a half ago. We had broken up towards the end of fresh year. Broken off. She got a boyfriend who wasn't long distance and there's only so much birth control talk a girl can listen to. He didn't like me. He told her I was manipulative which in retrospect was true and he told her I was the reason she stopped eating that year which in retrospect fills me with a not very interesting feminist fury. But that's not the story I'm telling you, which is about this letter, a year after graduation and four years after we'd stopped being friends. It started as an "I saw this Frieda Kahlo painting and thought of you" kind of thing, but turned out much worse. Like: I saw this card (the painting where she's in a suit, which, let me be clear, I have never worn) and thought of you. Sentence, sentence. I met this guy and he proposed and so it's happening. Can you believe it? Big ring and all. Love Beck." I could believe it. What I couldn't do was write back. So now Rebecca is Rebecca somebody else; I don't think she would keep her name.

The reason this is significant, or not the reason it's significant but the reason it's appropriate to tell you is that I think Rebecca began my obsession with married people, even though she was not married at the time. I mean I'm sure my parents began it. They were married when they met each other, which gives me false hope. But Rebecca was my first, and this letter a year and a half ago proved it. She was always married, when it came to me.

Rebecca was the clearest, to give her credit. Rebecca at the age of seventeen looked me in the eye and said I can't imagine ever being attracted to a woman, which is remarkably clear, or unclear coming from a girl who was touching me about twelve waking hours a day and who made us put the beds together. Would I have suggested this? I would not. Because even though I believe in non-verbal communication I also respect verbal boundaries. That I know you want to logic belongs to the other half.

Why am I telling you about Rebecca and not about Mitch? Because Rebecca happened at a time when I couldn't have known any better, her being my first married person and not even married yet. Whereas my love for Mitch came from a stubborn, demented, and unhealed idiocy. Years later. Closer to married. Sending mixed messages, and maybe it's my life of everything feeling so stupidly simple that makes me go for mixed messages.

Are you sure you didn't fall in love with me last night?

Because it felt very mutual. It felt like a mutual fascination and I don't just mean the sex. But you know maybe I do mean the sex. When I'm with someone I don't love, I can tell what she feels about me. But when you're crazy for a person it always feels mutual. Like you notice your eyes keep meeting but then you realize that you stare at her all the time so every time she even looks up at you your eyes are going to meet. Once I thought I was in the middle of a lingering, sensual, silence. This straight girl walked me to my car and we stood for minutes, hesitating together, to the point where I asked her to come home with me and was surprised she was surprised. She said no. It had been this pause, this unmistakable pause. So I drove away and realized she had just been waiting for me to get in my car. It was a one-way unmistakable pause. But she wasn't anybody.

He told me you have a direct line to god. I believe that. But then, I'd believe anything about you.

I should ask him what it's like to have a person all to yourself.

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You may CUT but you may not CHANGE the words. Please introduce the monologue with title of play and author's name.

Feel free to send a video link to yourself performing the monologue through the Contact page, and let me know if I may share! Thanks and be well, KH

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