

*A Room of My Own*  
*(And I'll Probably Have to Clean It Myself)*

by

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It is the 1980's, in the Chicago housing project apartment of Marika Carmichael, an aspiring young black writer who works for a fast-food chain by day and attends community college at night—all the while sharing with her equally-enterprising husband the care of their infant daughter.

In a literature class, Marika has been assigned to read Virginia Woolf's classic essay, "A Room of One's Own," Woolf's speech to aspiring young women writers in 1929. Marika does not expect to find much in common with the upper-crust Woolf, but while reading, she conjures up the spirit of not only Woolf herself but also that of Judith Shakespeare, Woolf's imagined younger sister of world-renowned William.

The three travel to Woolf's and Shakespeare's Londons, and Marika also tries to teach them about her life in the tenements of Chicago. The women find that although their lives differ in some very fundamental ways, they have each been searching for one and the same thing—a room of her own.

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Time: 1980

Characters: **Marika Carmichael**; late teens or early 20's; Black, an aspiring writer, she is a literature student at a Chicago junior college; Marika is a wife, mother, and puts herself through school by working at a fast-food restaurant. Sshe is completing an assignment on Virginia Woolf. She's done her homework on Woolf's life but is looking for the writer's soul;

**Virginia Woolf**; late 40's or upward; the famous British writer as imagined by Marika while reading Woolf's essay on women and fiction—the classic, *A Room of One's Own*. Mrs. Woolf is doing research for the essay and a preliminary speech to aspiring young women writers at a London arts society in 1928.

**Judith Shakespeare**; early teens; the younger sister of famous William as imagined by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. Young, innocent, a tomboy who must make the transition to being a proper Elizabethan woman but whose emotions and ideas—every bit as brilliant and strong as her elder brother's—are thwarted every step of the way.

Setting: The stage is divided into three spaces—one belonging to each woman in her time. Around the entire stage is a gravel path.

At Rise:

*The stage is dark except for MARIKA CARMICHAEL standing in a pool of light. She is dressed in the uniform of a well-known hamburger chain—cap and all. She looks straight into the faces of the audience and speaks with an ironic smile.*

Marika:

Would you like fries with your cheeseburger—medium, large, or heart attack? *(She laughs.)* My fabulous career. You're looking at my wardrobe, aren't you? How you like my baaaaad hat? Yes, ma'am? You didn't order cheese? Says here you ordered a cheeseburger...yes, ma'am...you want a cheeseburger, hold the cheese. I'll get you a hamburger. *(To audience)* You're thinking I'm a loser, aren't you? Oh, yeah you are—come on, admit it. You're thinking you'd rather starve than do this job all your life. You don't mind eating the delicious French fries—admit it, you like them too—but you don't want to be the one chucking them in the bag. Well, somebody's got to do it. Anyway, I'm not going to be doing this all my life either. I got a future. I'm working my way through college...one burger at a time.

*Lights up on Marika's tenement apartment in Chicago. It is clearly the home of a couple without much money, but it's clean and cheery. There is a baby buggy at the door, and Marika goes and pushes it into the apartment. There are grocery bags on the table, and she begins unloading them.*

Marika

Macaroni and cheese. We eat a lot of macaroni and cheese. Four boxes for a dollar. *(She removes her shoes.)* Three buses. I had to take three buses to get the baby to the clinic for her checkup. This is my daughter, Clarissa. She's sleeping and if you think I'm going to wake her up to say hello you're out of your mind.

*She begins folding laundry from a nearby basket which is overflowing. There are pink baby clothes, a man's custodian shirt.*

Marika

Her appointment was for eleven-thirty but they didn't call us till after one. *(Folding a man's shirt)* I met Samuel there after work. He had the baby this morning while I worked. He wanted to go into the doctor's with me, but he had to get to work. He's a janitor—and, no, he doesn't want to clean up other people's crap any more than you do—but,

again, somebody's got to do it and Samuel is not going to be doing that all his life either. He goes to Washington Junior College too—and for those of you who don't know—that's Harold Washington, not George. *(She folds baby clothes.)* They lost her file. At the baby clinic. Couldn't find it anywhere. Kept asking me “was I sure I'd been there before?” What do they think? I was trying to lie my way into a doctor's appointment? Steal some white woman's appointment for her more-deserving baby? I shouldn't have worn this uniform there, but I had to go straight from work. You don't get no respect dressed in a Micky D uniform. I saw the nurses snickering at me. Incompetents. From now on I'm taking all my previous paperwork with me. She's doing fine, by the way...the baby... gained three pounds. Trouble is, so did her mother. *(She laughs.)* The day's shot, and I didn't get a chance to do my reading yet. I better read while the baby's asleep.

*Marika searches through a diaper bag, pulling out numerous must-haves for the baby. Finally, she finds A Room of One's Own.*

Marika

I've got to read it for Lit class and then write a paper on it. Virginia Woolf. You know her? I didn't—well, I'd heard her name—another dead white writer. There are so many of them, especially when you're an English major. You'd think a black man never wrote a book, let alone a black woman. *(She begins reading.)* A Room of One's Own. Okay, Miss Virginia Woolf, tell me something I don't know.

*VIRGINIA WOOLF appears. She is giving a speech to a group of young women in 1928. She addresses the audience.*

Woolf

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction, I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder...

*Marika flips the book closed, thus suspending Mrs. Woolf midsentence.*

Marika

Naw, I'd better get this place cleaned up a little. *(She does a little housework, then sits back down.)* I should get some reading done before the baby wakes up. *She resumes reading, thus re-animating Mrs. Woolf.)*

Woolf

...I began to wonder what the words meant, "women and fiction." They might mean simply a few remarks about Jane Austen, a tribute to the Brontes, a respectful allusion to George Eliot. But at second sight, the words seemed not so simple. The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like...or women and the fiction that they write...or women and the fiction that is written about them...or it might mean...

Marika

Maybe I should start Samuel's dinner. *(She puts down the book, thus suspending Mrs. Woolf again.)* Okay. I'll read just a few more minutes. Or it might mean what?

Woolf

...or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. *(Marika changes her mind again and goes to put the book down, but Mrs. Woolf has had enough.)* Young Woman! Will you please let me finish my speech? You're the one who got me started in the first place.

Marika

Ahhh...ooh-kay. *(Marika pulls up a chair and reads.)*

Woolf

Thank you. ...But when I began to consider women and fiction in that light, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion, to fulfill what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer: To hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever.

Marika

Another thing to dust.

Woolf

All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

Marika

Money is only a minor point if you were born into it.

Woolf

I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon the great problem of women and fiction. They remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems. But in order to make some amends, I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at the opinion about the room and the money. In your presence I am going to lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind my statement. Perhaps you will find some bearing upon women and some upon fiction. At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.

Marika

*(She closes the book.)* What time is it?

Woolf

I give up. *(Woolf goes to her area of the stage and begins to write.)*

Marika

*(To audience)* Who couldn't write with a room of her own like that? I can just see her expensive wooden desk, and her leather chair, and a cut-glass or maybe china cup holding her quills...

Woolf

Quills? This is 1928, not the Middle Ages!

Marika

No, not quills. What did you write with in your day?

Woolf

We chizzled on rocks.

Marika

Sorry, Mrs. Woolf. Ink wells. I can see your pens and your ink well and your notebook—perhaps with your monogram on it—filled with heavy bond paper. And a window with a view of—what? A lovely English garden? Or maybe Buckingham Palace itself?

Woolf

Ah, no, His Majesty is not my next-door neighbor.

Marika

Whatever, I know for sure it isn't Cabrini Green with P. Diddy blaring away and a hundred kids trampling down what little grass there is pretending like they're Michael Jordan.

Woolf

I didn't understand one word of that.

Marika

This is my own room, Mrs. Woolf—well, mine and Samuel's and now Clarrissa's—which I want to straighten up a bit before he gets home and I leave to go to school. You have to clean your own room, Mrs. Woolf?

Woolf

I see what you're getting at—but perhaps you don't know as much about me as you think. More research is needed, young woman, for that paper you're writing.

Marika

What are you looking at out your window, Mrs. Woolf, a boulevard with horse-drawn carriages?

Woolf

We have motor cars...a few of them...Leonard bought one but it seldom runs.

Marika

Leonard is her husband...a real jerk.

Woolf

A what?

Marika

Sorry.

Woolf

How do you know Leonard?

Marika

I have already researched your life—for that paper I'm writing. I read the biography your nephew wrote about

you and all your diaries.

Woolf

My personal diaries????? How did you get them?

Marika

They were published.

Woolf

By whom?

Marika

Your husband.

Woolf

And after reading them, you concluded that Leonard was a...a what? A jerk?

Marika

Well, yes.

Woolf

I am not familiar with that word, but it can't be good.

Marika

It's not.

*Mrs. Woolf ponders this, then begins giggling.*

Woolf

The other day we were motoring down from London to a little hamlet for luncheon, and the motor car overheated. Leonard got out and began cursing the car and kicking it. A crowd of townspeople gathered round and stared at us like we were quite mad.

Marika

Like I said, a jerk.

*Virginia Woolf giggles more, then breaks into a big smile and laughs despite herself.*

Marika (Cont'd)

Now that's the Virginia Woolf I want to get to know. It's clear in her diaries that she has a sense of humor—this girl can misbehave—but nobody ever mentions it. You mention Virginia Woolf and people groan like you're talking about—

I don't know—Ebenezer Scrooge before the awakening.  
This woman can be annoying, I grant you—

Woolf  
—well thank you very much—

Marika  
—but please don't tune her out. There are two Virginia Woolfs—  
would that be Woolves? That's a little joke.

Woolf  
Very little.

Marika  
One of them wrote this amazing little book.

Woolf  
Why, thank you.

Marika  
And the other one is a pain in the ass, so just bear with me.  
(*Holding the book up reverently.*) And it IS a classic. *A Room of*  
*One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf. (*Woolf gets up expectantly.*)  
Puny little book, isn't it? (*Woolf sits down, crestfallen.*)

Woolf  
It is my speech to aspiring women writers at the London  
Arts Society.

Marika  
It was considered very radical in her day. When she  
published it in book form the Old Boy fellows would not  
even read it. Said she had disgraced herself by writing such  
tripe after they'd taken her into their bosoms as a serious  
writer. Much too “feminist,” don't-cha-know? I hadn't heard  
about it, when my Lit professor told us we had to read it.

Woolf  
Your professor, really? Convey my thanks to him.

Marika  
Her.

Woolf  
Her? Times have changed! I'm beginning to get  
excited about your assignment. Shall I proceed?

Marika

Oh, sure.

Woolf

Thank you. (*Officially beginning*) The spirit of peace descends like a cloud from heaven, for if the spirit of peace dwells anywhere, it is in the courts and quadrangles of Oxbridge University on this fine October morning.

Marika

Oxbridge isn't the name of one real university, of course. She doesn't want to mention a real name, but, like, dah, who can't figure it out? *Oxford. Cambridge.* Get it?

Woolf

Oxbridge is an invention, yes, but fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fiction. Therefore I propose making use of all the liberties and licenses of a novelist to tell the story. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them. It is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will, of course, throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it. You came here, however, to learn about "women and fiction" did you not? May I now proceed to take you where you have not been before?

Marika

That's why I read—take me to England, girlfriend!

Marika

Wait—did I hear the baby?

Woolf

Young Woman!

*Marika goes to the buggy, carrying the book, which means Mrs. Woolf goes with her too. They both peer into the buggy.*

Woolf

It seems to be sleeping.

Marika

"She" is sleeping.

Woolf

Good, let's continue, Young Woman.

Marika

You know, I have a name.

Woolf

Really? Oh, yes, of course. What is it?

Marika

Marika.

Woolf

That's a...different...name, isn't it? It sounds a bit like Mary. In fact, I once knew a girl named Mary who looked a bit like you.

Marika

Like me? I doubt that.

Woolf

It's true, around the eyes, the chin. What was her name? Mary Beton? Mary Seton?

Marika

I'm Marika—Marika Carmichael.

Woolf

No matter.

Marika

Maybe not to you. (*To audience*) You may think she lacks a certain warmth—but—well, you should know that she wrote most of *A Room of One's Own* when she was in bed following one of her bouts of madness. She went mad quite frequently.

Woolf

Was it necessary to mention that?

Marika

Everybody else does. You can't mention a book by Virginia Woolf without somebody saying, "Sure, she wrote well, but, you know, she was..." (*She twirls her finger in a crazy motion near her temple.*) Forgive me. Crazy.

Woolf

I called it my disease.

Marika

Yeah, well, your family called it madness. If only I had the luxury of going mad. (*Frivolously*) “I’m feeling a bit mad—I shall have to take to my bed and write.”

Woolf

A girl of thirteen does not wish to be called “mad” and put to bed.

Marika

Oh...ah...thirteen?

Woolf

When my mother died.

Marika

Eew, I forgot that.

Woolf

I lost all control. I sobbed and carried on. I could not sleep. I would not eat.

Marika

Your mother had died—you weren’t mad—you were grieving.

Woolf

They told me I went mad. A nurse tried to force food on me constantly to make sure I did not starve myself to death. The more they tried to get me to eat, the less I’d eat.

Marika

Anorexia Nervosa.

Woolf

Pardon?

Marika

It’s an illness—teenaged girls refusing to eat. Somehow that’s how you coped.

Woolf

We *had* to cope. Father fell apart after Mother’s death—brooding one moment, violent the next. It was especially hard on my elder sister, Stella, whom Father confiscated as his

personal slave after Mother's death. He kept her secretly to himself for hours on end and expected her to run the household as if she were his wife. He would scream at her for spending too much money on a joint of beef, then weep at the dinner table because he was sure she wasn't "fond" of him.

Marika

Parents. It was my mother who drove me crazy. What a piece of work she was. *(She abruptly resumes reading.)*

Woolf

Oxbridge University...autumn...fine October weather...golden and crimson bushes to the right and left, glowing with colour. Even it seemed burnt with the heat of fire. On the further bank of the river, willow trees weeping in perpetual lamentation, their hair about their shoulders. Strolling through this ancient campus, with its impressive quadrangle, smooth lawns and massive buildings...ageless tranquility. There's the chapel. Looks more like a cathedral, doesn't it? The sound of music reaches my ears as leaves flutter red to the ground. Even the sorrow of the old organ is serene, more sorrowful than sorrow itself. *(She listens to the music.)* Ah! And there—there—is *the* famous library! It houses treasures, manuscripts of Thackeray and Milton, and Lamb. Look, look, I can follow Lamb's footsteps across the quadrangle actually to the door where the treasures are kept. *(beat)* I should have like to have been a student here.

Marika

Me too. Harold Washington Junior College doesn't have quadrangles.

Woolf

Of course, I did not attend school.

Marika

Hold everything! Virginia Woolf did not attend school???

Woolf

My brothers did, but my sisters and I were educated at home, as most girls were then. My mother instructed us—until she died—and the occasional nanny. Occasionally my father would instruct us himself—which we dreaded. My father was Sir Leslie Stephen—one of the most eminent authors and critics of his day. You've heard of him, of course.

Marika

Nope.

Woolf

Well, no matter. Father put great stress on learning and assessed our progress by having us recite and read to him. My poor sister Laura. Half sister, really, by Father's first marriage—both Father and Mother were married and widowed before—Laura was not able to read well and she stammered and stuttered in Father's presence. Father would shout at her to improve, but she could not. Father disciplined her increasingly and she became worse instead of better. Then, on one particular day, when Laura was stuttering terribly and making reading mistakes left and right, Father took a rod to Laura for her disobedience, and Laura, Laura cursed him! *Cursed him!!!!* Can you imagine? A girl cursing her father, her own father? Clearly, she could no longer be allowed to interact with the rest of us children, so Father locked her in a room off to one part of the house. He assumed she would become contrite, but she became more and more belligerent, impossible to control. Father—well—he felt forced to place Laura in an institution where he said she could be better cared for.

Marika

How long did she stay in that institution?

Woolf

Let's see...she was seventy-five when she died.

Marika

You mean she stayed there all her life????

Woolf

Don't think about it—no use thinking about it! I, on the other hand, loved to read and recited very well for Father. He said I devoured books for breakfast. Father gave me complete use of his library, and—if I may be allowed a moment of immodesty—I think I gave myself a better education in that library than many of the gentlemen educated here at Oxbridge. I was reading the classics by age fifteen—in Latin *and* Greek! Still, when my brothers came home on holiday and told me of their school adventures, I should have liked to have gone to school.

Marika

Wow—Virginia Woolf didn't go to school. Who knew? At least I'm going to community college. I know it's just junior college...nothing fancy...but they've got some good teachers there. Hey, I'm reading Virginia Woolf, aren't I? It's an education. Samuel and I have a future—that's what matters.

Woolf

You and your husband go to the same school?

Marika

Uh huh.

Woolf

You go to a men's college?

Marika

It's not a men's college. It's a community college—for everybody.

Woolf

A college for everybody? The men and women attend classes together?

Marika

Yep.

Woolf

Only men attend Oxbridge. I am only here as a guest, at the invitation to luncheon from some of my male friends.

Marika

Must be nice to have friends in high places.

Woolf

While I'm here, I'm going to do some research for my speech about women and fiction at the library. How fortunate to be here on a glorious day like today. Oh, look, there's the undergraduate rowing team! Their oars dip into the water's reflections, like my thoughts, lifting and inking in the waves, and then the water closes again after them, completely, as if they had never been. But wait—my tranquility is shattered by their waving and shouting...at me? Are they shouting at me? But we haven't been introduced...odd... but on this perfect day, in this sun-kissed sanctuary, I feel I, too, can be a bit informal. *(Stiffly waving rather like the Queen)* Good morning, gentlemen.

Marika

That was informal?

*An imaginary beadle—policeman—startles her by tapping her on the shoulder.*

## Woolf

Yes, Constable? Oh? Not on the grass? Here? But I thought that women were not allowed on the grass only on the quadrangle. I see. Women may not step on the grass anywhere on campus. This is the turf. There is the gravel. Women must stay on the gravel. Yes, sir, I'm going straight away. *(To the audience)* You see, only scholars associated with the university may walk on the grass—and since women are not allowed to be scholars at the university, gravel is the place for me! That foolish rule has been in effect for three hundred years, but this is 1928, civilization is marching on. Why don't they get in step?

*Standing on the gravel, Mrs. Woolf is suddenly embarrassed at having lost her composure in front of the audience. She smiles at them sheepishly, then checks her time piece.*

## Woolf (Cont'd)

Ah, well, it's too glorious a morning to let a silly incident like that ruin my serenity. I've plenty of time to use the library before I join the men for luncheon. Provided I do not trespass on the grass again, I believe I have just enough time to gather the names of some women to mention in my speech. Taking care not to trespass on the lawn, to the famous steps of this famous library I go. *(An imaginary guard at the door stops her.)* What do you mean, sir? Why may I not enter? Women are allowed in the library only if accompanied by a Fellow of the College, or if we have a letter of introduction from the Dean? I see. Yes, I'm sorry too...sorrer than you! *(Angrily, Woolf retreats, then turns and shakes her fist at the library.)* Damn you, famous library, and damn every one of the famous men who have walked through your doors!!! Ah, why do I bother? That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library. Venerable and calm, with all its treasures safely locked within its breast, it sleeps complacently, and will, so far as I am concerned, sleep forever! Never, never will I ask for its hospitality again. I vow never to attempt to wake your echoes nor wake you from your three-hundred-year stupor! *(She checks her time piece again.)* And it is still not time for luncheon—apparently there is nothing for a woman to do at Oxbridge except eat—

*Chapel bells peal.*

Marika

—or perhaps pray—

Woolf

—for those who are of the faith, which I am not.

*Organ music is heard.*

Woolf (Cont'd)

Some service or celebration is going on in the chapel...or should I call it a replica of Notre Dame? I have no wish to enter, had I the right, and yet the groaning of the ancient organ sends forth the sorrow of Christianity more sorrowfully than sorrow itself and I confess a curiosity to see the inside, which, in these ancient structures, is often as beautiful as the outside. Still I would not dare to attempt to enter. This time I might be stopped at the door by a bishop demanding my baptismal certificate, or a letter of introduction from God!

*Mrs. Woolf sits down and ponders the chapel's grandeur. Marika sits next to her.*

Woolf (Cont'd)

Can you imagine the gold and silver that had to flow into those coffer to erect this cathedral?

Marika

Uh huh. A lot.

Woolf

An unending stream of gold and silver, but, then, it was the Age of Faith and money poured in from kings and queens and great nobles. And when the Age of Faith was over and the Age of Reason had come, still the same flow of gold and silver went on from the chests of merchants and men who had made a fortune from industry—endowing fellowships and chairs in their names—hence the costly equipment and splendid observatories and libraries...

Marika

...which woman can't use....

Woolf

*(Contemplatively)* Money really is quite important, you know.

Marika

You're telling me?

Woolf

People who tell you that they don't worry about money are people who have money and therefore do not need to worry.

Marika

Amen!

Woolf

Ask a charwoman or a widow who is bringing up eight children—

Marika

—Ask me—

Woolf

.—and they will tell you—

Marika

—honey, I will tell you—

Woolf

—that they worry about money very much. Why is one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? Why must we women work so hard to have so little?

Marika

W do you mean “we?” You've worked hard?

Woolf

Indeed I have worked for a living.

Marika

Do tell.

Woolf

Life was comfortable but there was no huge family fortune passed on from generation to generation, if that's what you are inferring.

Marika

I read that your father was knighted in 1902.

Woolf

And died in 1904, and, nevertheless, we were never rich. We were upper middle class—professionals. I come from a long line of writers and...*(with shame)*...lawyers. I have earned my living at various intervals by addressing envelopes and making artificial flowers and reading to old ladies...oh, yes...and teaching the alphabet to children. That may have been the worst.

Marika

You don't like children?

Woolf

I like them. I adore my sister Vanessa's children...but...did you ever try to teach them? You ask them to sit down and they stand up. You ask them to go left and they go right.

Marika

Yes, they're children. So why didn't you ever have children?

Woolf

What a cheeky question!

Marika

That's me—cheeky all over—so? Why not?

Woolf

If you must know, shortly after we were married, Leonard consulted my doctors about the advisability of my having children. He and they decided against it because of my delicate health.

Marika

“He and they” decided, huh? Did you have any say in it?

Woolf

Leonard always knew what was best for me.

Marika

Did he?

Woolf

I've thought...I might have been a good mother.

Marika

Why, sure you would have. You can hold my baby when she wakes up.

Woolf

No!

Marika

Well, that was direct and to the point. Mrs. Woolf doesn't hold babies. Mrs. Woolf doesn't take care of people. People take care of her. Mrs. Woolf reads books to old ladies and teaches the alphabet to children and calls it work. Well, some of us have to do a helluva lot more than that to earn a living.

Woolf

What do you do?

Marika

I work at McDonald's.

Woolf

McDonald's what?

Marika

It's fast food...

Woolf

"Fast" food?

Marika

Uh...it's...uh...a restaurant...sort of.

Woolf

Oh, you're a waitress!

Marika

Sort of. I take orders.

Woolf

From Mr. McDonald?

Marika

Never mind. Yeah, I'm a waitress.

Woolf

Then I needn't tell you about the difficulty of the work itself or the impossibility of living on the small amount of money it brings in. But what still remains with me as the worst infliction is the poison of fear and bitterness those days bred in me. To never have enough. To always be doing work one

does not wish to do.

Marika

That's how I feel!

Woolf

To always be flattering and fawning over others who have what we need.

Marika

Yes!

Woolf

All this becomes like a rust eating away at the bloom of spring, destroying the tree at its very heart.

Marika

The heart and soul!

Woolf

And that was the way I lived before I was given my magic purse.

Marika

Your what???

*Mrs. Woolf removes a coin purse from her pocket and opens it playfully. Marika peeks in. She shrugs. Mrs. Woolf laughs merrily and closes it.*

Woolf

My magic purse is never empty. It has the power to breed money automatically. It is a fact that still takes my breath away.

*She waves her hand over the purse like a magician.*

Woolf (Cont'd)

I open it...and there is a ten-shilling note. I take it out. Pay the grocer...or the seamstress or...

Marika

or...the waitress——telling her to keep the change, of course——

Woolf

—Close it. Open it again to pay the baker or the chimney sweep...and voila! There they are! More ten-shilling notes!

*(She is giddy with delight and actually kicks up her heels.)*

Marika

You feeling okay?

Woolf

Never better! Society gives me chicken and coffee, lodging, clothing, respectability, and leisure time—which I choose to use for writing—all in return for a certain number of pieces of paper which were left to me by an aunt I scarcely knew, for no reason other than her brother was my father. She fell off her horse, poor old girl—my aunt, not the horse—and I became the recipient of five hundred pounds a year for life!

Marika

Was that a lot of money in those days?

Woolf

That's about...ah...fifty thousand American dollars.

Marika

My God! Fifty thousand dollars!

Woolf

And no force in the world can take it from me. It's inherited! Five hundred pounds a year will keep one alive in the sunshine. My aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me—bitterness and hatred are gone. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me.

Marika

It's like winning the lottery!

Woolf

A lottery. Some win. Some don't. I did.

Marika

Most don't, Mrs. Woolf. Most of us don't have an aunt who went riding to the hounds and broke her neck and left us a fortune.

Woolf

She wasn't hunting, dear, she was merely riding out to take the air in Bombay.

Marika

*(To the audience)* Don't you just want to smack her sometimes?

Woolf

Pardon?

Marika

Never mind. Mrs. Woolf, what year was this?

Woolf

1920. I remember because the news of my legacy reached me about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. I was reading a newspaper about the suffrage when a letter arrived from my solicitor telling me I was an heiress.

Marika

It was a very good year for you.

Woolf

Indeed. But let me ask you this, Marika. Of the two events—my aunt leaving me five-hundred pounds a year forever and women receiving the right to vote—which do you think more important?

Marika

Women getting the right to vote, of course.

Woolf

Not to me. The money seemed infinitely more important.

Marika

How can you say that?

Woolf

What difference does the right to vote make for a woman scrubbing floors for a living?

Marika

At least with the vote, we women can vote politicians into office who will represent our interests..

Woolf

I have yet to see that occur. Our men in office remain there not by representing women's concerns, but by harboring in their breasts the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people's fields and goods perpetually. They make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children's lives. If your baby were a boy, would you want him to die in a war?

Marika

I don't want any baby—boy or girl—to die in a war.

Woolf

Women don't die in war because women don't go to war...  
They are the protected sex.

Marika

Not any more. Women are soldiers now too.

Woolf

Why haven't women ended war?

Marika

A lot of us are asking that question. It seems like women have become more like men, instead of vice versa. Where did we go wrong, Mrs. Woolf?

Woolf

Did I give you the mistaken idea that I have the answers to the questions I pose? For me, it is the greatest release of all to have the *freedom* to think of these things in themselves. Do I like something or not? Is that my opinion or not? My dear, I am not trying to give you the answers to life. I am trying to give you the opportunity to ponder the questions—I give you a view of the open sky!

*They sit silently and ponder the sky.*

Woolf (Cont'd)

Logically, if women take part in all activities and exertions that were once denied them...expose them to the same exertions, make them soldiers and sailors and dock laborers, will they not die off younger and quicker like men also?

Marika

That's exactly what's happening. Women are getting killed in war and having heart attacks much younger now. Cancer is rampant. Remind me, how did your mother die?

Woolf

She had influenza and it turned into rheumatic fever, but it was a long, long time ago and things were never discussed openly then. Father was so easily upset. He could not bear to be reminded of Mother. He missed her desperately, but, moreso, he needed her

desperately. That's why he replaced her with my sister Stella.

Marika

You had another sister too.

Woolf

Vanessa. And my four brothers, George, Gerald, Adrian, and Thoby.

Marika

And Stella had to take care of all of you?

Woolf

Poor Stella, trying to run that enormous household and she just a young girl herself. And then when Jack...

Marika

Jack? Jack...*(She goes to another book and checks it.)* Oh, yes, Stella's fiance.

Woolf

He almost wasn't. Father decreed that Stella could not marry—he needed her for himself, of course—and Jack demanded that Stella marry him immediately. He said “he could wait no longer.”

Marika

What a tug of war for Stella. An overbearing father, an overbearing fiance. A household of children needing her...

Woolf

And me lying a bed “mad.” No wonder Stella died—to get away from all of us!

Marika

It says here that Stella died within a couple of years.

Woolf

Yes.

Marika

Of what?

Woolf

Appendicitis.

Marika

*(To audience)* I thought she'd say that. This would be a good

time for me to tell you that Virginia Woolf had a very selective memory for facts—just like the rest of her family. In Mrs. Woolf's diaries, she wrote that Stella died of appendicitis, but I got the real poop from her more recent biographers—like this one, for example. A friend of the family wrote some letters giving rather personal info about the family.

Woolf

Such as what?

Marika

Such as Jack got Stella pregnant so that your Father would have to let her marry him, and that dear ole' Jack had an insatiable sexual appetite and "injured" Stella on their honeymoon. Poor Stella got infected, lost the baby, and died.

Woolf

*(Incredulously)* Is that how it happened??? I didn't know—Father would not allow us to attend Stella's funeral.

Marika

That jerk.

Woolf

Another jerk?

Marika

Yep.

Woolf

Are all men jerks?

Marika

No!

Woolf

*(Playfully)* Are all jerks men?

Marika

Um...ah...er....

Woolf

Never mind. Let's get back to my speech.... Where was I? The quadrangle is lovely in....

Marika

...the autumn...we get it...it's fall....

Woolf

Why are you upset?

Marika

It's no good to keep this buried, Mrs. Woolf. It's what breaks a woman's spirit. Stella preferred to marry a brute rather than stay in that house. Terrible things happened in that house, didn't they, Mrs. Woolf?

Woolf

I want to return to my speech about women and fiction.

Marika

Tell us about your brothers George and Gerald. (*Looking in the books*) Brothers, brothers...George and Gerald.

Woolf

Half brothers, really, from my mother's first marriage.

Marika

They came into your bedroom at night.

Woolf

Tea.

Marika

What?

Woolf

Tea. I'd like a cup of tea.

Marika

Do I look like your maid?

Woolf

Well...yes.

Marika

Yeah, well, I'm not. I'm a writer just like you. Now let's talk about this...your brothers came into your bedroom at night.

Woolf

I can't remember, I can't remember.

Marika

You have to remember...I remember...someone used to come into my bedroom at night too.

Woolf

Now, the quadrangle...

Marika

Yeah, the quadrangle is beautiful in the autumn!!!!!! But life isn't lived on a beautiful quadrangle. It's not always sunny like autumn but cold and dark like winter.

*Lighting on stage changes. Marika goes into her own memories.*

Marika (Cont'd)

It was my father who died when I was a kid, not my mother. Oh, no, dear ole' Mom lived. Not long after Dad died, she got a boyfriend. She was kind of hung up about sex and didn't like to admit that she and her boyfriend were "doing it." So she never talked to me about her relationship with this guy. He just started hanging around, then spending the night. And Momma never said a word to me about him. Never explained anything. Even when he started coming on to me, she didn't seem to notice. I'll never forget his name—Artie. God, I hated that man.

*She becomes a young girl talking to the imaginary Artie.*

Marika (Cont'd)

You leave off touching me there, Artie! Momma will be home any minute and she'll be furious if I tell her you've been touching me there...I will too tell her!

*Beat. She is lying on the floor, as if watching TV. She is pleading with her imaginary mother.*

Marika (Cont'd)

But I don't like him, Momma. I don't want to be left alone with him anymore. I know he's your boyfriend. I know he helps you with the rent. I'll get a job if it's money you're doing it for. I'm not trying to be insolent—I don't like him! Because...that's why! Well, for one thing, he messes up the place...and...he smokes too much...and...he drinks...and his breath smells bad...I am not trying to find fault with him!

I am not jealous! Momma...he...he makes me kiss him goodnight! No, he does not mean it like a daddy. Please listen to me! I am not trying to cause trouble! Momma! Momma, please don't go to work tonight. Please don't make me stay alone with him tonight! *(Her mother slaps her.)* Okay. Okay, Momma. I'll behave. Yes, Momma, while you're at work tonight, I'll behave for Artie.

*Marika returns to the present and addresses the audience.*

Marika (Cont'd)

Of course, Artie got me pregnant in no time at all. My mother was devastated—apparently hadn't had the slightest notion it was coming. So she claimed. She was the best woman at burying her head in the sand that I ever knew. What? My baby? Her? No, no, no. She's not Artie's baby. That was almost ten years ago now. I got an abortion back then. Momma took me to a clinic and made me swear never to tell anybody...oops...well, I guess I broke that promise. Well, frankly, I don't care who knows, and Momma's been dead a couple of years now, so I don't suppose it makes any difference. *(Beat)* Just the same, keep it to yourself, okay?

*Marika resumes researching in the pile of books. Mrs. Woolf sits preoccupied with her own memories at her desk.*

Woolf

I remember there was a lookingglass in the hall, outside the dining room door, and a slab for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small, my half-brother Gerald lifted me onto this, and as I sat there, he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes, going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting—disliking—it. What is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body—how they must not be touched—must be instinctive. It proves that Virginia Stephen Woolf was not born on the 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1882, but was born many thousands of years ago, and had from the

very first to encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of  
ancestresses in the past!

Marika

You never told anyone about that until you wrote about it  
towards the end of your life. You were ashamed like me.

Woolf

I cannot look in a lookingglass without shame. I have done my  
best to explain why I was ashamed of looking at my own face.  
But I don't suppose that I have got at the whole truth. I dreamt  
that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face—the face of  
an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder. I cannot be  
sure if this was a dream, or if it happened, but I have always  
remembered the other face in the glass—whether it was a dream  
or a fact, and that it frightened me.

Marika

The fear goes away when you talk about it.

Woolf

But these memories—these exceptional moments of life that come  
to the surface unexpectedly—mostly end in a state of despair.  
These moments of being bring them a peculiar horror and a  
physical collapse. It's better not to speak of them. I want to  
return to my speech. Better to stick with the truth as we know it.