

The Orchid Lovers



Fengar Gael

949-509-1338

www.fengar.com

gaelfengar@gmail.com

Agent Contact:

Elaine Devlin Literary, Inc.

411 Lafayette Street (6th floor)

New York, NY 10003

212-842-9030

elaine@edevlinlit.com

*“Green her flesh and green her tresses,
In her eyes chill silver gleams.
Green, green, I want you green,
While the gypsy moonbeam plays;
Things at her are gazing keenly,
But she cannot meet their gaze.”*

Frederico Garcia Lorca

CHARACTERS

NELLA KIMANJANO: an African research chemist; born in Kenya and educated at Oxford, she has a British accent; age mid 20s

HOWARD GOLDEN: an American molecular biologist; age late 20s

JUDITH AMBERS: an American astrophysicist and galactic mapmaker; age 40s

ARMANDO AMARILLO: Judith's estranged husband; a Mexican-American orchidologist; age 40s

AURORA AMBERS: the daughter of Judith and Armando; age 16

TIME

The near future

PLACE

The Mojave Desert near the fictitious town of Mescalina, California, at RIDELF: the Research Institute for the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life Forms. The stylized set suggests a laboratory for scientific analysis, an office, greenhouse, and conference room. To the side stands a pyramid constructed of incongruous objects welded together: books, radios, speakers, computers, ironware, earthenware, stones, bones, skulls, and a smartphone on top.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(The laboratory at RIDELF where HOWARD GOLDEN, a molecular biologist, and sixteen year old AURORA AMBERS are seated at their computers. NELLA KIMANJANO, a research chemist, stands aside, clutching her phone, gazing at her reflection. SHE speaks with a British accent.)

NELLA

Oh, how this ghastly mirror lies! How it fails to reflect beyond the surface of things, beyond the shallow image of myself in the prison of this place. But imagine a phone with a mirror that reveals beyond reflection, turning and twisting the light to penetrate the past and glimpse the tracks of the journey that led me here: my childhood in Nakuru, my girlhood in Nairobi, then my years at Oxford University which is where I spied the notice: Wanted: research chemist willing to endure isolation. Address: RIDELF, Mescalina, California. During the interview I learned that RIDELF is the Research Institute for the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life Forms. It is located on the Mojave Desert, and before Miss Aurora arrived, there was only myself and a molecular biologist named Howard Golden.

(NELLA retreats to her computer as HOWARD reads a list to AURORA.)

HOWARD

Two bogus star maps, one feline brain in formaldehyde, a flash drive from a hypnotized abductee, and our little surprise. Let's show her, Nella.

(AURORA peers at Nella's computer screen.)

NELLA

It is the whisker that arrived Thursday. The density is triple the thickest Asiatic hair and the medulla is filled with pigment: yellow. Now look here, on the surface of the hair we have magnified a single cell, and there you see: a new species of microorganism!

AURORA

A bacterium?

NELLA

Yes, but even this tiny bug is like a new moon in the galaxy. We lift the cosmic veil and learn more about the universe.

AURORA

Who sent it?

HOWARD

There's no name or postmark. It was left in a box by the back door with a note saying to expect a hand.

AURORA

Really? A hand!? Wait till Judith sees this.

HOWARD

She'll see a lot more when she upgrades our computers and electron microscopes. Here's a list of what we need.

AURORA

You can give it to her yourself; she's arriving tomorrow.

HOWARD

Great, so we're finally going to meet our elusive employer.

NELLA

How jolly good to have your mother in residence!

AURORA

She's not just my mother; she's an astrophysicist who maps galaxies nobody's even heard of.

HOWARD

So did these maps convince her we're not alone, and she wants to be the first kid on the block to make contact?

AURORA

Yeah, but she also likes things neat so you'd better dismantle your junk pile or whatever that thing is.

HOWARD

It's not a "junk pile"; it's a sculptured pyramid, our beacon to the cosmos, and it gives us a place to stash all the garbage that comes through here.

NELLA

Please, Miss Aurora, could we not keep it? At RIDELF we are so solitary, and building our pyramid is most amusing.

AURORA

Look, it's Judith's decision, but you're not paid to build pyramids.

NELLA

We did not mean to offend, Miss Aurora.

AURORA

I'm *not* offended, and stop calling me Miss Aurora!

NELLA

When your mother arrives will she be bringing your father?

AURORA

No.

(AURORA starts to leave.)

NELLA

Where are you going?

AURORA

To check out my orchids -- not that it's any of your business.

NELLA

Ah, so the greenhouse is yours. How I would love to see the orchids!

AURORA

Sorry, but it's a controlled environment and I'm the only one with the door code.

(AURORA departs.)

HOWARD

Arrogant little twit!

NELLA

Behind her arrogance is a wretched child who speaks from the depths of her sorrow. Yes, despite her coldness, I am moved by her. (*pause*) I envy you, Howard. I am too respectful of authority. When you are a minister's daughter, you submit to the laws of the church, then later to teachers and employers. My professors say Nella has discipline, but a good scientist must also have courage. So Howard, I have made a decision: as soon as my earnings are sufficient, I will travel to enlarge my mind.

HOWARD

Where will you go?

NELLA

Everywhere! But for now I will explore this wilderness of wolves.

(Darkness descends as COYOTES howl, and several lights in the pyramid start to flicker.)

SCENE 2

(The conference room of RIDELF where JUDITH AMBERS, a woman in her forties, stands leaning on her cane. SHE is joined by HOWARD and AURORA as NELLA stands aside, speaking into her phone.)

NELLA

Today you are summoned to meet Doctor Ambers. You are eager to impress her but your nerves are as frayed as your collar, and the heat has rumpled your freshly pressed pants.

JUDITH

The air conditioning should be functioning in an hour. Christ, how I hate the desert -- it's exile, rustication in hell. *(pause)* I'm encouraged by the whisker, and when the hand arrives, I want a thorough and immediate analysis. So what else has come in?

HOWARD

Fourteen claims including three aerial videos, nine photographs of deltoid shaped objects, one chromium plated skull, and a two headed iguana. If you don't mind, I'd like to keep the iguana -- as a souvenir.

JUDITH

By all means. Or you could add it to your "sculpture".

HOWARD

Yeah. *(pause)* I can't resist asking why you're doing this.

JUDITH

Everything I own is invested in RIDELF. Besides you, I employ four full time observers to monitor the radio dish, searching for messages from deep space.

AURORA

Judith's in contact with the SETI Institute and NASA's astronomers.

JUDITH

Most of my colleagues think I'm nuts, but nine months ago I was home in Berkeley mapping a stellar cluster in the constellation Aquarius. There are several Earth-sized planets that NASA's Webb telescope spotted light years away in a Goldilocks zone where there's evidence of water, methane, molecular hydrogen and possible alien microbes. I had a small receiver operating in my office when my husband, Armando, entered the room and wham! A signal came in at a pitch and volume that caused the windows to shatter and both of us to collapse. We woke up in the hospital where Armando proceeded to forget everything he ever knew, while I had shattered my left fibula and am now prone to brain squalls -- better known as migraines.

HOWARD

What about the signal? Did anyone else detect it?

JUDITH

No, and nothing's come in since. I've graphed a recording of the sound frequencies that resemble an indecipherable language vaguely similar to Arabic. (*referring to her laptop*) Look here: you can see they came from a trajectory that reached earth in a matter of seconds which means whatever it was moved faster than light which is why nobody believes me and why I built RIDELF. I'm trying to find whoever sent the signal.

HOWARD

Suppose it's not a "who" but a "what"? Suppose your receiver malfunctioned? In which case it could be an errant meteor or a weather anomaly.

JUDITH

Of course, it's what most of my colleagues think, and I admit it's possible but improbable.

HOWARD

And an alien is *more* probable?

JUDITH

Look, this hasn't been easy. Usually I'm the skeptic, always taking a hard line against superstitious crap the gullible public substitutes for truth. But I've analyzed the evidence, and I'm convinced that something from somewhere made contact.

HOWARD

What made you start looking in the first place?

JUDITH

The music, all the galaxies expanding and exploding -- snap, crackle, pop! The other reason is that NASA's discovered over one thousand exoplanets outside our solar system and since some of them have water, life could have developed.

NELLA

Tell us, Doctor Ambers, if there are aliens with the power to transport signals, why have then not introduced themselves?

JUDITH

I don't know, but at least I'm trying to make it easier.

AURORA

Maybe this alien's been captured, and might even be dead. That's why RIDELF's offering a reward for proof of E Ts. We're appealing to the greed of whoever found him.

JUDITH

So far we've had no credible evidence -- until now. *(pause)* So what about you, Nella? Why did you come to work in this god forsaken place?

NELLA

I came to employ my skills as a chemist. I also believe the universe is vast enough to sustain other creatures, though my father questions the value of our mission. He says, "Nella, why look for aliens when you should be curing cancer, making clean energy, and cigars that won't kill me."

JUDITH

And why are you here, Howard?

HOWARD

ETs have been an obsession -- ever since I was a kid watching Star Trek. After a stint at teaching, I figured it was time to head for the Mojave to analyze phony UFO claims. In fact, I was just starting to think of better ways to spend my life when the whisker came in, though I'm curious: why did you choose us?

JUDITH

We had nearly three hundred applicants, but we wanted people with broader interests than science. For example, you're highly qualified, but you also play the flute and piano, and Nella's an accomplished painter and poet. You're also free of attachments.

AURORA

She means you're not married and don't have kids.

JUDITH

Aurora researched your genealogies. *(to Howard)* Your mother's from a long line of Sephardic Jews and your father's Austrian and Russian. Nella's part Kukuyu and Swahili, and her great grandfather's Portuguese.

HOWARD

And what about Aurora and you, Doctor Ambers?

JUDITH

Aurora's father had an English mother and Mexican father. My own father's from Wales, and my mother's German; but my great grandfather was Australian. The cook's Chinese, the cleaners Polish, and my gardner comes from Brazil. The point is that at RIDELF at least some racial and ethnic subdivisions are represented. For someone visiting Earth, these factors could be a significant correlative, and I wanted RIDELF to be a microcosm of the world.

HOWARD

Okay, but assuming the reality of your alien, why would he care who our ancestors were? And what about the gender correlative? I'm the only man here.

JUDITH

Our astronomers are men, but they're in Mescalina, and Armando would be here if he wasn't in a nursing home learning to tie his shoes.

AURORA

I think the alien contacted Judith on purpose -- because she's an astronomer and knows what he needs to know.

NELLA

But there are other astronomers on every continent. Perhaps, Doctor Ambers, you were contacted because of where you are living. Perhaps the alien is looking through his own telescope at the Sierra Nevada mountains, the miles of beaches, and all manner of flora and fauna. Perhaps he sees a vast and bountiful country where he will find wise, tolerant people of all creeds and colors.

JUDITH

Oh, please...

NELLA

Yes, and here in California he will be greeted with open arms!

JUDITH

Or by some pervert willing to cut off his hand. Sorry, your idealism's touching, but it's bullshit. Ours is a history of genocide and slavery, and we're still the gun runners of the world and why not? We've got more than our fair share of freaks and fanatics of every kind.

HOWARD

Yeah, an alien could blend right in.

NELLA

We must hope to heaven the hand never arrives.

AURORA

Are you kidding?! We hope whoever has him sends *both* hands, his head, and his heart!

HOWARD

Really? Is that what you hope?

JUDITH

Look, all we want is to prove to the bastards that he actually exits!

SCENE 3

(Celestial sounds echo as lights reveal the laboratory, where AURORA sits staring at a panoply of screens as NELLA gazes into her phone.)

NELLA

Today Howard has suggested a visit to Miss Aurora's sanctuary. She's been here a week but you rarely see the girl, and suspect she suffers from the addiction to which we are all susceptible.

(HOWARD joins NELLA by Aurora's computer.)

AURORA

Here's where I check out all the UFO web sites.

HOWARD

Too bad you can't log into the Defense Department's research.

AURORA

I'm not a hacker, but we've got a petabyte of storage on a Zema operating system that uses my own digitized voice.

HOWARD

Can you order yourself to get some fresh air? I mean, you seem in a big hurry to keep human beings out of your life.

AURORA

I'm better off alone.

HOWARD

But if you don't socialize, you don't relate, and if you don't relate, you don't have perspective. All you have is information.

AURORA

Which is all I need. These are my formative years and it's the only way to escape the shit of violence and power trips. Judith wants to keep me from internalizing the low status of women since most of history is all about men.

NELLA

I am proud to be a woman, and your own mother maps the universe. Do you not wish to follow in her orbit?

AURORA

No thanks, I'm going to be a botanist.

NELLA

Ah, like your father?

AURORA

Yeah, but his specialty is epiphytic orchids; I like the terrestrials and lithophytes that live on rocks. We're exposing seeds to radiation and making some really weird species.

NELLA

How you must miss him.

AURORA

I still have Judith, and she's a certified genius. Last year she was elected to the United Nations of Scientists. They're making a transcultural value system to save the world.

NELLA

Ah, yes, one can see she is a woman of vision.

AURORA

She knows we're headed for another mass extinction. If bombs or viruses don't wipe us out, there'll be so many of us crammed onto the planet, we'll be killing each other for food, and the only solution will be legalized infanticide and mandatory death for everyone over eighty.

HOWARD

Oy!

NELLA

You cannot be serious.

AURORA

What we really need is another planet, another Earth. Armando has a physicist friend who claims there's these if-worlds that we're living in at the same time we're here. They're parallel universes with parallel earths just like ours, and we're all there, only living different lives, and maybe it's not so fucking hot and full of psycho guys with guns.

(NELLA approaches a small radio transmitter.)

NELLA

Ah, what have we here? A transmitter!

AURORA

Leave that alone!

HOWARD

Hey, the kid's sending messages! (*reading a screen*) "Composition 37 for two guitars."

AURORA

Don't touch that!

NELLA

May we listen?

AURORA

No! It's music my dad composed for the orchids -- to see if it affects their growth.

NELLA

And now you are sending his tunes through the universe, echoing to all the if-worlds.

AURORA

It's only six hundred watts!

NELLA

Please, can we not hear one, just one little tune?

HOWARD

Come on, Aurora, be a sport.

AURORA

Well, okay, just this once, then leave me the fuck alone!

(AURORA turns on the music. Melodic strumming is heard as lights reveal the pyramid sculpture where speakers are broadcasting the same music that Aurora is transmitting as darkness slowly descends.)

SCENE 4

(The laboratory where HOWARD, JUDITH and AURORA are examining a bright yellow three-fingered hand. NELLA stands to the side, speaking into her phone.)

NELLA

This morning another box arrived, but the wind has erased all signs of who delivered it and how -- which makes us all aquiver with great anticipation.

(HOWARD turns to NELLA.)

HOWARD

Have you ever seen anything so awesome?

NELLA

Yes, a marvelous new creature revealing itself. Congratulations, Doctor, you finally have your incontestable evidence. All living matter is carbon based, but this hand is not. It belongs to someone not of our world.

JUDITH

Strange how the fingers are flattened like ribbons.

AURORA

Yeah, like the petals of an orchid, a cattleya hybrid; they're the same shape.

NELLA

Many forms in nature resemble one another, but such a brilliant yellow -- not like any pigment on Earth.

HOWARD

Look how the epidermis seems translucent and smooth.

NELLA

I wonder where is home sweet home?

HOWARD

It may not belong to a sentient being. Maybe Aurora's right and it's more like a plant, so maybe the whisker isn't a whisker but the filament of a stamen.

JUDITH

If it's a hand, we could assume it was removed from an arm or armlike appendage.

HOWARD

(referring to his computer) It's a clean cut -- with a sharp, surgical knife. Look at this magnification: it's bloodless, veinless, with a molecular structure that forms millions of five point stars.

NELLA

And whether it is conscious or not, still living or dead, today we are truly certain there is life in the universe beyond ourselves. Now everything will jolly well change; the whole world will go spinning like a top!

JUDITH

Human nature won't change. We'll still be a pack of illiterate, innumerate hypocrites, still killing each other or cowering in our bunkers.

NELLA

But this will bring us out of our bunkers! In fact, I think I may have seen this creature.

JUDITH

What...? Are you serious?!

NELLA

Yes, I saw an image on a screen in our sculpture.

HOWARD

When?

NELLA

Last night, a male image.

HOWARD

Describe him. Was he yellow?

NELLA

Somewhat...

HOWARD

Was he missing a hand?

NELLA

Not that I noticed.

JUDITH

Was he some vile nematode with six lips?!

NELLA

Oh, no, he was like us.

AURORA

Right, and did he beam down from a silver saucer?

NELLA

No, like I said, he appeared on a screen in our sculpture.

JUDITH

Oh, for chrissake...

HOWARD

Nella! Look at your thumb.

(Pause as THEY stare at Nella's yellowing thumb.)

HOWARD

Did you touch it...? The hand! Did you touch it?!

NELLA

Cautiously. But I was wearing gloves.

AURORA

Even her palms are yellow.

NELLA

Goodness, I must scrub quickly!

HOWARD

You're sure you were wearing gloves?

NELLA

Yes, of course!

AURORA

She was; I saw her!

JUDITH

Oh, Christ, it's spreading.

HOWARD

Scrub, Nella! Now!

(ALL but NELLA freeze as she grasps her phone,
trembling as she speaks.)

NELLA

You scrub and scrub, but in the mirror you see yellow blots bleeding across your skin, covering your blackness, penetrating through the pores to the bones. You were never the purest of pure black, but not by choice. A Portuguese grandfather injected his white genes, so you were descended from matings of power inequities, from seductions and and rapes, and now you are raped by yellow, a cruel inhuman yellow: yellow fever, yellow blight, yellow yellower than ripe bananas, school buses...

HOWARD

Calm down.

NELLA

...and the butterflies fluttering in your breasts.

JUDITH

You're shaking; re you sick?

HOWARD

We should call a doctor.

NELLA

Oh, my black beauty. Why am I becoming yellow?

AURORA

It's moving up her arms!

NELLA

A glazing of sulfur...

AURORA

She should be masked and quarantined!

JUDITH

Look at her neck.

AURORA

If Nella's infected, then maybe we all are! Nella could be the beginning. What if they're creating a new race...?

HOWARD

What...?

AURORA

You heard me: a new race!

(lights fade to darkness as COYOTES howls.)

SCENE 5

(At night, the pyramid sculpture pulsates with life as a radio transmits the music of a guitar.)

SCENE 6

(Two weeks later; the conference room where NELLA stands, her entire face and body a radiant green. HOWARD and JUDITH sit at the table while AURORA wields a video camera and NELLA speaks, into her phone.)

NELLA

After ten days of yellow you turn green -- four days of greenness and getting greener. With yellow you could say you have jaundice, but with green you are bilious and can no longer walk the streets or eat in cafes. Your life is over; you have lost your skin.

JUDITH

Nella, please sit down!

NELLA

Where is your skin? If only it could hang in a closet so you could wear it again: your mama's rich mantle of mocha, your papa's black coat, as pitch black as blackest tar, as black as ebony ink, raven feathers, and the deepest darkest midnight.

HOWARD

There's no evidence of somatic gene transference or germ line engineering. The molecular change is exclusively pigmental and not related to any known virus or bacteria.

AURORA

It's obviously affected her personality.

HOWARD

Any phenomenon affecting the body affects the personality, but the change from yellow to green was caused by a spontaneous contraction of the melanophores -- so they reflect green.

NELLA

Tell me, Howard, do they reflect misery? Loneliness? Who will want Nella now? What man? What nation? Who will want a green woman?

AURORA

Every freak in the country; you're a novelty.

NELLA

This is no time to be cheeky! My umbilical cord to humanity is cut. I am alone, I am poisoned, (*to Aurora*) and stop filming my misery!

AURORA

Judith wants everything saved for posterity.

HOWARD

You heard her: stop!

JUDITH

Put the camera away and sit down!

AURORA

Fine! I hate doing it anyway.

HOWARD

Can we start the meeting?

JUDITH

Sit down, Nella.

AURORA

Not near me! Sorry...

JUDITH

You all know the agenda. By now we realize that even at sub zero centigrade, the whisker's decomposed, and the hand seems to be disintegrating on its own timetable. We were prepared to send photos and detailed descriptions to the exobiology lab in Sacramento, but without actual evidence, they're not likely to take us seriously enough to respond.

HOWARD

Now Nella's your evidence.

JUDITH

Exactly, which brings me to the problem of security. Your contract forbids contact with outside agencies, including the UFO network. NASA and SETI know we're looking for ETs, but if anyone suspects we've succeeded, all hell will break loose. *(pause)* We all know the implications of what's happening here, which is why the timing of any formal disclosure is absolutely crucial. I mistakenly assumed our alien was trying to make race a neutral factor, make us all green so there'd be no racial inequities, but obviously we're not all affected.

NELLA

No! Only Nella, black Nella! Black! I am black! Rivers of blood have been spilled, oceans of tears, lifetimes of misery, but my heart's home is black! Black! Black!!

HOWARD

(pause) It's still conceivable that we're all affected but that it's taking longer to incubate.

JUDITH

It's also conceivable that Nella's been specifically selected -- to start a race of hybrid survivors.

HOWARD

But why Nella?

NELLA

Yes, why Nella?!

HOWARD

Look, we keep assuming this is all related to the hand or the whisker, but maybe it's something else altogether, something we've completely overlooked. I mean everyone's followed protective protocol, but Nella's the one infected, so maybe there's an intelligence working here, and it's purposely chosen Nella to be the prime carrier, but why Nella and not you or me or Aurora?

JUDITH

Isn't it rather obvious? Presumably or at least possibly because she's African.

HOWARD

So why African?

JUDITH

I've been thinking about that. We know there are biological divisions distinguished by genetic markers for skin pigments and eye color, hair texture and stature. On the plus side, the darker races are taller, more athletic, and less likely to get skin cancers. On the negative side, they're more susceptible to heart disease, sickle cell anemia, and statistically they have shorter life spans, higher rates of poverty, lower cognitive scores due to lack of nutrition, education, repressive political cultures, and then there's the continent of origin.

NELLA

You mean Africa, the cradle of civilization, where all of us now living were first born.

JUDITH

And one basket case country after another.

NELLA

Ha! You whiteys still see us in trees, throwing spears,...

HOWARD

Nella...

NELLA

...eating bananas and humping in the grass!

AURORA

Jesus!

HOWARD

Nella, please...

JUDITH

Look, I've been there. Some Africans can't get decent plumbing, never mind an education. Well, look at the place: famines, civil wars, rampant diseases. It's the snake pit of the world!

NELLA

The snake pit was poisoned by your bloody colonialism!

JUDITH

Maybe, but if it weren't for our "bloody colonialism" you might be using your head to haul laundry.

HOWARD

Oy...

AURORA

Jesus, mom.

JUDITH

Well, she certainly wouldn't have gone to European schools or had a career! The trouble with Africans is they can't form competent governments. Their systems were always tribal and they're *still* tribal. Petty quarrelsome chiefs fighting petty quarrelsome chiefs.

HOWARD

Tribal wars aren't exclusively African; look at the Middle East, South America, your own political parties.

JUDITH

Yeah, sure, but where else is there such a pattern of continual, unrelenting chaos, and it's getting worse. Parts of the dark continent are sliding into the dark ages -- enslaving women, kidnapping girls, and forget the computer revolution. In some places it's irrelevant since you can't find a current to plug the damn thing in.

AURORA

Can we stick to the agenda?

NELLA

Africa is my agenda! My poor Africa where we envy your prosperity, but even here in America black citizens are only four lifetimes away from slavery, and still they are fighting for their freedoms, their dignity.

JUDITH

Yeah, but they're not hacking each other with machetes.

NELLA

No indeed, you Americans like your weapons clean and antiseptic -- state of the art rifles and drones. You push your tidy buttons and run home claiming to have used your powers for peace, and meanwhile you peddle your lethal wares to poorer countries so they can kill each other in the bloody name of liberty, democracy, progress!

HOWARD

She's right: our gadgets haven't civilized us.

JUDITH

Yeah, sure, but don't tell me tribal cultures will ever equal our own, and stop sneering at me!

AURORA

Can I leave?

JUDITH

No!

HOWARD

I think it's time we adjourn.

NELLA

But wait! The agenda includes an inquiry into Nella's ancestral history.

HOWARD

Let's save it for later.

NELLA

Nonsense! I love reminiscing! I will start with Great Grandma Tisa who was born in a village that reeked of sewage. To Tisa colonialism, communism, capitalism -- these were big words from big books she could not read, nor could she imagine such luxuries as fine wines, cotton bedding, never mind electric ovens, air conditioning, computers or even the presumption of progress. But Tisa endowed her children and grandchildren with her history, wisdom and affection, and I would not trade her African smile for all your milky white privilege, your fat ass bank accounts, and even your cyber technology!

JUDITH

Bullshit! You already have! You're here, aren't you? You're here because America works: you can drink the water, drive on the freeways, and we make the toys the world wants to play with -- which gives us more money, more power...

NELLA

More arrogance! To steal from countries that sell themselves cheap -- all their riches, their labor. It is *my* world that supports yours!

JUDITH

But it's *my* world that's smart enough to let it! And it's my world that can educate and employ gifted scientists like you!

NELLA

We are all born with gifts, doctor, *all* of us. Every biologist knows racial distinctions are minor, especially pigmentations which are based on only eight genetic variants in four narrow regions of the human genome.

JUDITH

That may be true, but even your genetically gifted Einsteins can't calculate on pig farms; your Shakespeares can't write dodging bullets.

HOWARD

Stop already! For chrissake, don't you ever quit?! Haven't you any pity? If this "alien" has targeted Nella because of her color, then it's racist. Her color shouldn't matter.

JUDITH

Well, it does; it always has!

NELLA

How I miss my blackness.

AURORA

It could have been worse; you could've turned orange or purple.

NELLA

Or white! I have never wished to be any color but my own.

HOWARD

Nella, when this meeting ends, let me graft some skin, and I'll experiment with lasers and epidermal dyes.

NELLA

We should be making an antidote!

HOWARD

You know, you're still looking good, you're still...beautiful with a well proportioned body.

NELLA

Yes, it continues to follow my commands. It eats and speaks and weeps into pillows, but it will always be black beneath the green.

JUDITH

Oh, stop being so maudlin.

HOWARD

Jesus! She's got every right to be whatever she wants. In fact, shouldn't we all be feeling sympathy and compassion?

JUDITH

Sure, but save a little for yourself; you could be next.

NELLA

Yes, our alien has his green African; so Howard could be his green Jew, and what about his green bigot? You jolly well have your own gods, Doctor Ambers.

JUDITH

If I'm such a bigot, then why did I hire you? But you're right about my gods. You've even made the altar where I worship: your totem to science and technology.

(AURORA stands to leave.)

JUDITH

Aurora, where are you going?

AURORA

To check my messages.

(AURORA exits.)

JUDITH

Get back here, damnit! Aurora!! *(pause, she sighs)* She never listens.

NELLA

You are wrong, doctor. It is her great misfortune that she does -- since you vomit up everything you think.

JUDITH

I'm only trying to prepare her. Believe me, by the time she's my age, the world will be a much meaner place, and it's my job to ensure her survival.

HOWARD

What about her humanity? Seriously, what I want to know is how she'll survive your bleak view of the world?

JUDITH

Aurora makes her own world: she has her orchids and computers. There's nothing wrong with that; she's creative and productive.

HOWARD

And headed fast for a lifetime in therapy. This is no place for a kid; why isn't she in school?

JUDITH

She passed her equivalency exams so she could stay here. It was her own choice; she's continuing her education on her computer and she's three grades ahead of her peers.

HOWARD

But does she ever beam down to ride a bike, take a walk or see a movie?

JUDITH

Not really. Her father was the one who took her hiking and inspired her orchid mania. Anyway, it's not your problem, and what the hell do you know about raising kids?

(NELLA moans, touching her forehead.)

HOWARD

Nella? Are you all right?

NELLA

Green babies. Who will want green babies?

HOWARD

Nella needs a thorough physical exam, and an antidepressant. *(handing Judith a list)* I've made a list of who to contact.

NELLA

Why bother? The doctors will refuse to touch me. No one touches me.

(HOWARD reaches out his hand.)

HOWARD

I will.

JUDITH

No you won't!

HOWARD

I'll do what I damn well please!

NELLA

Please, Howard, hold my hand.

JUDITH

Don't you dare!

NELLA

Please, oh, please, before I wither and waste away...

(HOWARD grasps Nella's hand.)

NELLA

Ohhhhhh...

JUDITH

I wish you hadn't done that!

(NELLA closes her eyes and inhales deeply.)

NELLA

Ahhhhhhhh...

(AURORA returns and notices HOWARD clasping Nella's hand.)

AURORA

Oh, shit.

JUDITH

Howard! Release Nella immediately and scrub yourself raw! And from now on I want us all to be masked and wear gloves at all times.

HOWARD

I think it's a little late for masks and gloves.

JUDITH

As long as you're in my employ, you'll do as you're told! Aurora, I want you in my office in five minutes!

(JUDITH exits as HOWARD turns to AURORA.)

HOWARD

One of the advantages of adulthood, Aurora, is that you don't have to believe everything your mother tells you. Is she equally critical of everyone? I mean how does she feel about Arabs? The Irish? Mexicans?

AURORA

At least she's not a hypocrite. She just wants everyone to be more like her, but it's impractical. Not everyone can be as intelligent or productive as Judith. We need people like our cooks and cleaners.

HOWARD

You mean servants.

AURORA

Why not if you can afford them. Besides, why waste time doing stuff other people do better, especially if it's the only thing they can do.

HOWARD

The "only" thing they can do?

AURORA

Well, that and have kids. Our cook's sister just had twins, but she dumped them with her cousin who already had three.

HOWARD

Tsk, tsk, these people who breed like rabbits!

AURORA

They'll all wind up in factories or on farms.

NELLA

And how many rabbits will Miss Aurora have?

AURORA

None, and neither should you or any woman who cares about the planet.

NELLA

You will never have children...?

AURORA

There's way too many people, and the rich consume too many resources. Just one American uses more of the planet than fifty Bushmen, five Japanese, or three Germans.

NELLA

Yes, we are heedless and wasteful, but a child can be the carrier of your dreams and rituals. A child will teach you to love and bear witness to your life -- however grim.

AURORA

How many witnesses do people need, especially if they can't afford them. Look, what's happening to our lakes: Because of all the pollution and over-fishing, the trout have disappeared and been taken over by trash fish like eels and dogfish. When they tried to put the trout back in, they couldn't compete.

HOWARD

So what do you suggest? Mass sterilization of all the dogfish?

NELLA

And would you butcher all the old and bony fish?

AURORA

I'm just saying that our whole way of life is being threatened, and even if we live to be old, the rain forests will disappear so there won't be enough air to breathe. Judith says the whole planet will look like a toxic waste dump and we'll have to live in a bubble.

NELLA

Oh, Aurora, how you make my green skin crawl.

(NELLA starts to leave.)

HOWARD

Where are you going?

NELLA

To be alone. Sometimes, when you are like this, emotions surge, and just now I feel hot. My tongue is on fire.

HOWARD

Let's take your temperature.

NELLA

No! This heat is a fever that makes my whole beastly body rabid with rage.

HOWARD

Anger's only natural, part of the grieving process.

NELLA

(trembling) Ohhhhhh, ohhhhhh, Howard...

HOWARD

What? What is it?!

NELLA

If I should die, take a scalpel and skin me.

AURORA

Jesus.

HOWARD

Nella, please...

NELLA

Strip layer after layer to see if the green has penetrated my heart, my liver...

HOWARD

Nella, honey, you know it hasn't.

NELLA

But it has! I can feel it! And when you cut to the core what will you find? What have I done with my sorry life? No significant discoveries, no worthy works of art, no precious children, not even a praiseworthy poem. My life has been useless! Fruitless! Frittered away! *(weeping)* Even God has forsaken me. Oh, Howard, what am I to do? Where am I to go?

HOWARD

There's no official quarantine, and Judith has no legal right to keep you here. You can go wherever the hell you want.

NELLA

Wherever I want...? *(pause, collecting herself)* Yes, I have a green card; I am a green woman with a green card.

HOWARD

I'll take you anywhere, anytime.

NELLA

Good! *(pause)* Then I want to live with the orchids.

AURORA

What...?

NELLA

Yes, in the greenhouse! A green woman should have a greenhouse.

AURORA

Sorry, that's not possible.

NELLA

I need to be somewhere beautiful; I cannot breathe in this crypt of computers.

HOWARD

Of course you can stay in the greenhouse.

AURORA

Look, it's *my* greenhouse for *my* orchids, and there's no room! I'd have to rearrange everything.

HOWARD

So start rearranging! I'll help.

AURORA

Look, you don't understand. Orchids can be very delicate; there's over three hundred species in there.

HOWARD

Good! So let's get started.

AURORA

But it's hot! And damp! It's like the fucking tropics!

NELLA

I love the tropics.

HOWARD

She loves the tropics!

AURORA

Look, I said *no* and I meant it!

HOWARD

You know, Aurora, *your're* the one who should be green! Since you obviously prefer the company of plants, you'd feel right at home.

AURORA

Very funny.

NELLA

Please, I must go now. (*to Howard*) I do not wish to be near...you.

HOWARD

Me?! I'm your friend!

NELLA

Forgive me, Howard, but with greenness comes -- I cannot speak it.

HOWARD

What...? Tell me!

NELLA

After the fury comes a thirst, a longing that is...lusting. I cannot explain, but the desert is dry, and where is the waterfall? Will you be my waterfall?

AURORA

(mumbling) Oh, shit...

HOWARD

Me? *(pause)* Look, you don't want a schlemiel like me.

NELLA

Do not tell me what I want! I want everything -- everything I have lost.

(COYOTES howl as night falls.)

SCENE 7

(Morning in the greenhouse where AURORA is watering her orchids as NELLA speaks into her phone.)

NELLA

Howard's lasers and dyes are ineffective, but after a week in the greenhouse, you no longer wish to mutilate yourself with knives and self hatred. Your thin skin has become calloused and you are feeling at one with the orchids, though you wonder how a thorny thistle like Aurora can be attracted to such flamboyant blooms.

AURORA

Eventually I want to build a factory for cultivating new species, although there's already thirty thousand.

NELLA

Here she feels rapture and is flushed with joy.

AURORA

It started when Armando brought a red phalaenopsis.

NELLA

This is where she hides.

AURORA

We kept it in our kitchen -- back in Berkeley. Then he bought some yellow Columbian buttercups and purple cymbidiums, and the next thing we knew we had our own greenhouse. It was a lot smaller than this.

NELLA

Oh, Aurora, if you had not built this paradise of colors, I would have gone mad. Such vibrant pinks and purples to heal my sorry soul. Yes, I have a green body, but you have a green thumb!

AURORA

I used to like the gaudy prom varieties, but now I like the shy pleurothallis that can only be seen with a magnifying glass.

NELLA

They are so beautiful, so erotic. Look how the seeds are like finely ground pepper. I cannot help myself, I want to eat them, all of them!

AURORA

Well, don't! Jesus...

NELLA

Then I will bloom! Call me the Nella Orchid -- a new and exotic hybrid.

AURORA

(backing away) God, even your hair's turning...

NELLA

I wonder what Mister Darwin would think of poor Nella?

AURORA

He'd think somebody'd spiked his drink.

NELLA

(pause) When I was a child, I was vexed to learn our ancestors were single celled creatures swimming in the primordial soup, dividing again and again until they produced organs, flesh, and bones. And to think we made our first appearance in Africa, my vast unfathomable Africa. But look at us today: fractioned by race and bloodlines, breaking the barriers that separate species, designing life to order, and here stands yet another mutation -- thanks to your mother.

AURORA

What do you mean?

NELLA

I would not be here if she had not employed me.

AURORA

Yeah, well, we wanted someone black and thought you'd be interesting since you'd lived in Kenya and England. And Judith said you wouldn't be bitter like American blacks.

NELLA

Oh, I am beyond bitter; I am inconsolable; the drums I hear come from hell.

AURORA

(pause) Judith worries about you. She's always checking with Howard about your moods and heart rate. They get upset when they hear you crying at night.

NELLA

From now on there will be no more tears! I have wept my last and am dry as the rivers that once flowed me to the world.

AURORA

You do seem...different.

NELLA

With continued greenness I become aware of awareness, mindful of everything yet judging nothing. My swells of rage have been replaced by a strange tenderness, and lately an aching fever -- especially when Howard comes near.

AURORA

He should never have touched you. Judith says Howard's -- never mind.

NELLA

What...? What about Howard?

AURORA

He stares at you -- constantly.

NELLA

Good! My poor sod, Howard; his heart was once wounded by a faithless lover.

AURORA

Really? He got dumped?

NELLA

He was keen as mustard to marry the girl, but she renounced him for another, and what about you? Have you ever been in love?

AURORA

No.

NELLA

You are not keen on boys?

AURORA

I haven't met one yet who was worth my time, but sometimes I think I should've been a boy. I mean who'd want to be a girl if you could be a boy? In some countries we're still mutilated, sold into slavery, or married off to guys who already have wives.

NELLA

In Kenya a widow of the Luo tribe can be inherited by her brother-in-law. This happened to my own Auntie Kai who was also forced to fornicate with a lunatic to ward off evil spirits. But here in America, girls are fancy free to do as they please.

AURORA

Yeah, but even here they're made to feel like shit if they're ugly like me.

NELLA

What rubbish! Trust me, Aurora you are most pleasing to the eyes. By twenty you will be smashing, and believe me, there are men who make you pleased to be a woman. I found one at Oxford -- my first love, a very good sort, very sexy.

AURORA

Was he African?

NELLA

An Englishman, the color of toffee. Now he is a pediatric surgeon in Kisumu. *(she sighs)* Oh, how I miss my Africa, all the smells of the markets with their melons and salty fish, and my doting parents and gentle sisters. They would look at me and know that beneath this green flesh are all the dawns and sunsets my child self has ever seen. Oh, the tears they will shed! Where is our black Nella? When will we see her again? But for now I must accustom myself to my new self and your orchids, especially these. Look how their crimson lips are puckered for a kiss.

AURORA

They're Flavillians from Brazil. They're worth about ten grand each, and there's only four people in the whole country who can clone them. Judith wants to sell them so we can upgrade the place. She also wants me to keep you comfortable and respect your privacy till she's ready to show you off.

NELLA

Ah, so I will be presented like a debutante...?

AURORA

Yeah, unless you escape. *(pause)* Have you ever wanted to?

NELLA

Of course, but where would I go? Should I join the circus?

AURORA

Why not? Everyone will want to see you. You'd be rich; you could have your own reality show.

NELLA

Please, do not tempt me with fame or fortune; I am much greedier. What I want is a new world where all borders to all nations are open; where everyone born is wanted; where the rivers flow clean, the air smells sweet, and the sparrows awaken me with song.

AURORA

Well, there won't be much left to sing about when ten billion people throw the whole eco-structure out of balance.

NELLA

Oh, Aurora, are you never weary of your Armageddons -- you and your doomsday mother!

AURORA

In forty years, I'll still be in my prime, and the place could be a fucking war zone.

NELLA

But you will be rich -- living in your bubble with the orchids!

AURORA

I don't want to live in a bubble!

(NELLA approaches AURORA, reaching out.)

AURORA

Stop! Back off, damnit!! You're coming too close!

NELLA

Such a pity I repulse you. Perhaps you should think of me as a big sister camping out with your plants. Sometimes I think I am becoming one, expecting my legs to turn into stalks, my arms to sprout leaves, and other times I wonder: am I *really* green or only being perceived as green -- by you.

AURORA

Of course you're green! Jesus, look in the mirror!

NELLA

Sometimes I feel I am living in a strange vision, but it is not mine. Perhaps it is yours...?

AURORA

That's crazy, you're here, I'm here, we're *really* here. I wish to Christ we weren't!

NELLA

Then bring me more mirrors -- to observe my transformation. I want them full-length! One here and another over there. You see, with greenness I can feel my senses enlarging. With my green nose I smell the lavender and eucalyptus oils your mother rubs into her feet, and with my green ears I hear a mournful melody.

AURORA

Really? You're telepathic...?

NELLA

Yesterday when I heard the music from your transmitter, an image came to my mind of a tall, slender man with black hair and tanned skin the color of my cousin Kombe.

AURORA

Really? Could he be my dad? (*grasping Nella's arm*) Wait! Where are you going?!

NELLA

You touched me. Goodness, how bold of you!

AURORA

(*rubbing her hands on her jeans*) Oh, shit! What have I done?!

NELLA

You neglected your mindfulness. (*she sighs*) Now I am going for a stroll.

AURORA

Wait! You can't go out like that! It's a hundred and ten degrees!

NELLA

If I burn, my blisters may bubble and burst; then like a lizard, I will shed my skin that lets me see beyond the prison of my body to all the if-worlds around me.

(NELLA walks away while stripping off her shirt.)

SCENE 8

(In one area, JUDITH is seated on a chair facing her computer; in another area, AURORA sits gazing at her own computer. Meanwhile NELLA carries a folding beach chair which she sets upon the desert. SHE is wearing a pair of mirrored sunglasses and is observing the action telepathically.)

NELLA

With my green eyes I can observe the world of RIDELF swirling around my throne. Yes, here I am the Green Queen, the focus of their fear and affection. Now Howard is approaching Aurora.

(AURORA is typing as HOWARD enters.)

HOWARD

What's up, Aurora?

AURORA

I'm trying to find my dad. The nursing home said he snapped out of his amnesia. They discharged him a week ago, but where the fuck is he?!

HOWARD

Maybe he went to visit friends...?

AURORA

No! Something's happened, I know it! We should call the police or hire detectives.

HOWARD

Why don't you give him a few more days? (*staring out a window*) Oy, look at Nella sunbathing.

AURORA

(joining Howard) She's getting fried! She should cover herself!

HOWARD

Why? She's magnificent, so brave and proud. I can't keep my eyes off her.

AURORA

She can't keep her eyes off herself. She wants more mirrors.

HOWARD

Great. That means she's finding herself as fascinating as we do.

AURORA

You didn't find her fascinating when she was black.

HOWARD

You're wrong, I always admired her. Nella radiates a nobility, a fearlessness, and yet she has a childlike innocence.

AURORA

She's not innocent! She's horny as hell and gets as totally pissed as anyone.

HOWARD

Sure, but there's no cold hatred in her heart. She still has the liberal virtues -- tolerance and compassion. And she wants progress and prosperity, but she wants it for everyone.

AURORA

She's so naive.

HOWARD

I suspect that someday she'll be exposed to the world but I wonder how people will respond to her.

AURORA

They'll think she's some kind of carnival freak.

HOWARD

Maybe. She'll certainly have a hectic schedule of appearances and interviews.

AURORA

Yeah, they'll have her endorsing everything green -- trees, spinach, mouthwash.

HOWARD

Yes! They'll start fan clubs and religious cults. They'll call her the green goddess, the start of a new solar age.

AURORA

Sorry, but it she's the start of anything it's a fucking nightmare. Take a look at your fingers.

HOWARD

What...?

AURORA

They're turning yellow -- just like Nella's.

HOWARD

Shit!

AURORA

Look at your wrist. It's yellowing...

HOWARD

Oh, God... *(pause)* I...I can sense a...a penetration.

AURORA

It's spreading up your arm!

HOWARD

I'm feeling...sick.

AURORA

Look, I'm going to have to avoid you. I don't want to get this thing; I mean, it's obviously contagious.

HOWARD

Oh, I don't mind you avoiding me since I find you and your mother insufferable.

AURORA

Nella should've been quarantined! Now we have to make an antidote. I'm going to take some pictures. We need a record of it's progression.

(AURORA takes out her phone and points the camera at HOWARD.)

AURORA

Smile!

(A bright light flashes as NELLA removes her sunglasses and speaks into her phone.)

NELLA

Ohhh, the ecstasy of a new green companion is almost unendurable!

(HOWARD stands terrified, stroking the contours of this features.)

NELLA

Howard cannot stop staring, beholding his emerging self, his face reflecting new dimensions of experience. Oh, green, proud green! The green of green fire, the sparkling green of emeralds, the blooming green of spring! Oh, green, the color of hope! The color of searching, groping, grasping for a great green consciousness; a great green future rising up, spreading across, seeding and weeding a new green garden for the rootless, the fruitless! Oh, green, maddening green! The world weeping rivers of green, gulping green by the gallons, pissing oceans of green; spewing forth great glistening geysers of green, generous green; flowing swift currents, past islands of envy, past forests of greed! Oh, green, ravenous green! The sweet soul of youth, the sour sweats of death! Deliver us from your deepest depths, make us bold, make us burn, bright flames ascending, fueling forever the true hues of heaven, fanning forever the wild wings of flight! Oh, green, proud green! Green is to shine, green is sublime, green is to flaunt your colors to the wind! Oh, green, glorious green! My green, green, greeeeeeens!!

(Darkness descends to black.)

SCENE 9

(Two weeks later in the conference room where NELLA and HOWARD and MIMIKO stand majestically with their green skin as NELLA speaks into her phone.)

NELLA

Poor Howard is resigned to his new skin. He insists there is something metaphorical about his mutation, but you tell him he is truly real, only rarer, riper, and linked to your own greenness and the Earth we are destined to save.

HOWARD

I don't want to save the Earth; I want to go home!

NELLA

The whole world is your home.

HOWARD

Right now I'd give anything to be riding the subway to my sister and a plate of potato latkes.

NELLA

At first you will feel the sorrow of loss.

HOWARD

But it's *not* loss! I can't lose who I am. Look at me, Nella: I'm a Jew! It permeates everything I do whether I'm green or not. Being green doesn't erase a childhood in the Bronx; it doesn't negate my parents or grandparents or everybody killed by ideological maniacs; and being green doesn't make me less miserable about being green!

NELLA

We are all born into tribes, we all have our rituals and histories.

HOWARD

I had plans to go to Russia next year. The Goldens have a family Torah in Kostroma that's two hundred years old -- two hundred years! My great grandfather survived the Nazis, then came to New York to start his own accounting firm. Last week I resembled him. Now look at me!

NELLA

Did you attend your temple? Did you practice your faith?

HOWARD

That's not the point!

NELLA

Then why all the fuss? Get a grip, Howard, and aren't you Americans famous for reinventing yourselves, for breaking with the past to embrace the future.

HOWARD

Hah! What future?!

NELLA

Life is no bowl of berries, Howard, we all we have to go with flow.

HOWARD

No we don't! And if I hear another fucking platitude, I'll scream!

NELLA

Be patient, dear Howard. In a few weeks you will be flushed and full of joy, touching everything you see because your new skin is so erogenous you begin craving everyone young and old, and soon you are aroused by the feel of fabrics, the carved leg of a chair, and the petals of a calypso orchid...

HOWARD

Please stop! You're scaring the shit out of me.

NELLA

Everything is erotic, the world has immense possibilities for desire, and soon you will know that nothing visible can be trusted. Everything has secret patterns, and the magnifications through your new green eyes will expose their beauty. You will feel forms in nature affecting your very soul. Think of it, Howard: this may be how God sees the world.

HOWARD

Now you're sounding like a hopped up guru, a born again on uppers!

NELLA

Shush, relax, soon such brooding will be impossible to sustain, though now I am covetous of everything -- even the sun that pours its honey in my hands. When I drink, it tastes like champagne. *(reaching out)* Please don't be afraid, my dear Howard. For weeks I have been craving your affection, and I know you care for me, so please, look at me. *(dropping to her knees)* My whole being is prostrate before you.

HOWARD

For chrissake, get up!

NELLA

Look at me laid bare: a raw and ravenous wound, weeping with joy that you have finally joined me, so please, my dearest friend, please let me touch you.

(NELLA stands, extending her arms to HOWARD who backs away as JUDITH enters wearing a mask.)

JUDITH

Sorry to break up the party, but it's time for our meeting.

(NELLA and HOWARD compose themselves and sit with JUDITH at a table.)

JUDITH

Aurora won't be joining us. She's ordered bio-safety suits for everyone working at RIDELF. Personally, I think it's too late. *(pause)* I'll make today's meeting brief: RIDELF has withdrawn the reward and officially ceased accepting evidence of extraterrestrial life. I've also laid off our observers in Mescalina. *(pause)* Any progress on an antidote?

HOWARD

Not yet. What we need is an anti-chlorodermic that works as both a treatment and prophylaxis. That's why we're sending samples of our cells through the gene sequencer, then instructing it to make an antigen that creates a nucleic acid antidote as well as a vaccine.

NELLA

Clearly, something in the instruction of our DNA is making us chlorodermic, though who knows where to find it among the millions of polymorphisms. But look here. *(pointing at the screen)* You see this strand of DNA? We all know that every cell has the same four letter alphabet soup of nucleotides. Now look at the cells from my skin.

(NELLA taps, types, and points to the screen.)

NELLA

Since yesterday there are two more nucleotides. You see, the soup's getting thicker.

JUDITH

My god, do you realize what this means?

HOWARD

Yeah, maybe homo sapiens aren't the pinnacle of creation anymore. What the hell? Our self esteem was pretty low anyway.

NELLA

Now it is time for homo-kimanjano! I have christened our new species after my family since I am the first.

JUDITH

What I want to know is why Aurora and I haven't been affected?

NELLA

You tend to avoid touching us.

HOWARD

Yeah, and maybe there's immunity for obnoxious kids and cynical astronomers.

JUDITH

(pause, she sighs) Now it's time for us to consider your options: I think you should remain quarantined, or we could enlist the best molecular biologists in the country to see if they can suggest a treatment. If we decide to go public, we need a strategy; we need to present you in a completely secured and sealed environment.

HOWARD

So we're prisoners...?

JUDITH

In addition to the possibility that you'll infect others, you'll be endangering yourselves. People will panic, and half the country's armed -- even I have a gun.

HOWARD

Really? Did you plan on shooting yourself?

JUDITH

The gun belonged to my father, but sure, I've been depressed. What about you, Howard, haven't you ever wanted to...?

HOWARD

To shoot you? Many times and myself twice: right now and when I lost Lisa Aronson to a sleazy tax lawyer.

NELLA

Even I brewed a fatal toxin -- on the first days of greening. Oh, the world is such a sorry gumbo of grief. *(grasping Howard's hands)* But we will improve the recipe!

(Darkness descends.)

SCENE 10

(Bright lights reveal the laboratory where AURORA sits alone at her computer, and NELLA speaks into her phone from the conference area.)

NELLA

Green ears and eyes can penetrate walls, and a few weeks later in the early morning, you spied Miss Aurora about to have a jolly reunion.

(ARMANDO enters dressed in black, unseen by AURORA.)

ARMANDO

Aurora...?

(AURORA turns and gasps!)

ARMANDO

Oh, darling, please don't be afraid.

AURORA

Dad...?

ARMANDO

I've missed you.

(AURORA moves to embrace ARMANDO.)

AURORA

How...how did you get here?

ARMANDO

As soon as I was well enough to travel, I cashed enough money to buy a used car. I was lost for a while, but in the end I knew where to go because I was getting your messages.

AURORA

I...I thought you'd forgotten us.

ARMANDO

Of course not -- never.

AURORA

You look thinner; are you okay?

ARMANDO

Yes, though I still have lapses. I'm told I had a form of retrograde amnesia coupled with post-traumatic stress. *(pause)* This is quite a place.

AURORA

It's called RIDELF: the Research Institute for the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life Forms. *(gesturing to the pyramid)* This pile of junk is made from all the rejected claims that came in.

ARMANDO

(pause) I see you have a greenhouse.

AURORA

Yeah, and I've got some new dendrobiums. I'll show you later, but we can't go in unprotected 'cause Nella and Howard are contagious. Come on, I'll get you suited up and give you a tour.

ARMANDO

Fine, but first I'd better say hello to your mother.

SCENE 11

(The conference room where JUDITH and HOWARD are seated as NELLA records her speech.)

NELLA

You are anxious to meet someone new, someone outside your circle of green, someone who will say you are not delusional, for there are times you wish to pierce your flesh to see if it bleeds green blood, to strike your bones to see if they will shatter like your life.

(AURORA and ARMANDO enter, both wearing their bio-suits.)

JUDITH

May I present Nella Kimanjano and Howard Golden, and this is Aurora's father, Armando.

HOWARD

Hello.

NELLA

(offering her hand) How jolly good to meet you!

AURORA

(to Armando) Stop!! Don't touch them! Stay back here!

ARMANDO

Please forgive me for staring, but you're all so...

AURORA

Green! They're fucking green!

HOWARD

Like aliens from Mars -- sorry if we seem like clichés.

JUDITH

It's only natural to find them repellent.

ARMANDO

No, not at all; I...I find you remarkably appealing.

NELLA

My goodness, Professor, such flattery! Be careful or you will make us blush.

(NELLA steps closer to ARMANDO.)

AURORA

Stay back!! Don't let them near you! They're creepy, always sneaking up, touching things and acting like they're smarter than everyone else.

JUDITH

Oh, for chrissake, simmer down.

(ARMANDO strolls around the sculpture.)

ARMANDO

I was admiring your sculpture.

HOWARD

It's a perpetual work-in-progress.

ARMANDO

I see it as a kind of allegory. I mean in some ways it reflects the history of forms and textures, from the stone age to the digital age.

AURORA

Right, garbage in, garbage out.

ARMANDO

(pause) So have you become a...a new race?

NELLA

We may be an immune response to our own species. At my stage there's a progressive symbiosis with nature. I can survive on little more than water and light.

HOWARD

A botanist like you should find us fascinating. With chlorophyll, we use light to make carbohydrates, so we don't feed on dead plants and animals.

NELLA

Someday we may branch out, and swallows will nest in our hair, ha, ha!

AURORA

Jesus...

HOWARD

We believe we're the result of unintended interactions with an organism brought by an extraterrestrial life form.

JUDITH

Apparently, the human race lacks the brains to solve its own problems so some alien is solving them for us. Our behavior can't be altered so we're being altered instead.

HOWARD

Are you as cynical as your wife?

ARMANDO

Judith isn't just a cynic; she's a wounded idealist.

JUDITH

How is it possible to be anything else? How can you watch the news and be an optimist?

ARMANDO

But only an optimist would build RIDEFL. Why search for extraterrestrial life if you don't hope to find something better?

JUDITH

Nella claims to have had several sightings. Of course she also has a vivid imagination.

NELLA

I know what I saw was ***not*** a mirage, although now I wonder why you look familiar?

ARMANDO

Maybe because your sighting was me. *(pause, he sighs)* I'm told I had somnambulant episodes and disappeared for hours at a time. I was always found walking near the freeway not far from here, usually staring at my phone.

(Pause as THEY stare at ARMANDO.)

NELLA

So tell us, Professor were you possessed by an alien life form?

ARMANDO

I haven't a clue, but if someone took up residence, he or she seems to have left.

NELLA

Are you certain?

ARMANDO

Wouldn't I know? Wouldn't I feel something? Do I seem different to you?

JUDITH

Yes.

AURORA

No.

HOWARD

Well, that's conclusive.

NELLA

Ha, ha!

JUDITH

Is it possible you delivered the whisker and the hand? (*referring to an iPad*) Here's some photographs. Does the hand look familiar?

ARMANDO

(*pause, staring*) Not really, though the fingers resemble the petals of an orchid.

AURORA

That's what I said.

HOWARD

If you were discharged and lost, where have you been?

ARMANDO

It seems that I purchased a guitar, then walked around Mescalina, stopping at street corners and improvising.

NELLA

Perhaps you will play for us. When we turn our green ears towards certain frequencies, we perceive sounds at the deepest cellular level. Perhaps our alien is expressing himself through your music -- to create a cellular susceptibility.

ARMANDO

Susceptibility...?

NELLA

To becoming like us. When enough of us are green we will affect the climate, all our industries and agriculture.

JUDITH

Nella thinks they'll make an ecologically benign world.

NELLA

Yes! From multi-cultural chaos to monocultural paradise with one stroke of the brush! We will begin here in California: tree by tree, river by river, city by city, I have a vision, a vision of spring, and we are just beginning to paint the sky! Yes, we will form the greatest movement of the century, of the millennium! White supremacy will be replaced by green supremacy!

AURORA

(whispering to Armando) See what I mean? They're batshit crazy.

ARMANDO

Well, I suppose if we're all green, then race will be the least important thing about us.

NELLA

Yes, but for now we are the new immigrants, infusing fresh blood, but I wonder: will we form a new culture, create new customs? Will we subscribe to democratic principles?

JUDITH

Two people don't make a culture.

HOWARD

We are attempting to create a vaccine, but what if it fails and Nella and I leave RIDELF. Suppose we each encounter four new people every day for one week. According to my calculations, every man, woman, and child on Earth would be in various stages of dermal mutation in six months, two weeks, four days and seven hours.

JUDITH

The entire global population...?

NELLA

Except for you and Miss Aurora who appear immune. But not to worry; we will issue our own green cards, though you may not vote, eat in our cafes, or swim in our pools.

JUDITH

You've made your point.

NELLA

If you are not like us, you cannot attend our schools, serve on our juries, drink from our fountains, or piss in our toilets. If you try, you may be beaten or killed. Yes, there will be laws against you and signs everywhere, signs that read "green only!" Green...

NELLA

...green, green!!!

HOWARD

Green, green!!!

JUDITH

Back off, damnit!!

AURORA

Leave her alone!!

ARMANDO

Please, please, stop...

JUDITH

(to Nella) What's gotten into you?!

NELLA

I am only jesting, Doctor. You see, Howard and I need you to stay white since you will be the test -- the test of our tolerance for others. Yes, we will protect the remaining pariahs, the genetically unclean ungreen.

JUDITH

Oh, please...

NELLA

Yes, bwanas, *you* will be the niggers now!

(Lights reveal the sculpture pulsating while turning luminous shades of green. Fade out.)

SCENE 12

(One week later at RIDELF where AURORA, JUDITH and ARMANDO remain in their bio-suits. AURORA is typing at one computer while JUDITH and ARMANDO stare at the screen of another, and NELLA stands aside, speaking into her phone.)

NELLA

Oh, green, wrathful green! This quarantine is detestable and shrouded in secrecy, though Howard is in better spirits, but we know that being green has not exempted us from cruelty, from enjoying the privilege of being the dominant race at RIDELF. After all, snakes are green, and so are sour grapes and poison sumac. As for Armando: you cannot not believe an alien would reside in a man who seems so delightfully human, who charms us with his winning smile and gentle ways -- so unlike his vexing wife or Miss Aurora who secretly continues her search for aliens.

(JUDITH, ARMANDO, and NELLA stare at a computer screen)

JUDITH

Howard seems to have recovered from his doldrums.

ARMANDO

So this is how you spy on them?

JUDITH

We don't *spy*; we're doing research. Aurora's filming a documentary, and I'm writing a thesis, a chronicle of their mutagenesis.

ARMANDO

(to Nella) Can they tell they're being watched?

AURORA

Yeah, but they don't give a shit.

ARMANDO

I'm asking Nella.

NELLA

Not always.

ARMANDO

(to Judith and Aurora) Do you ever wish to join them?

AURORA

No!

JUDITH

No.

JUDITH

(to Nella) We wonder why you touch each other so much.

NELLA

Why do you watch us touching so much? *(pause)* Because you are lonely and full of remorse.

AURORA

We're not lonely!

(JUDITH picks up a large binder and approaches ARMANDO.)

JUDITH

Here's a printed version of the family album. (*opening the album*) This is Nella when she first turned yellow, and here you can see her progression to green.

NELLA

At first we were wretched, but soon perceived ourselves as evolving, as extensions of Darwin's natural selection -- though perhaps it is Aurora's *unnatural* selection.

AURORA

What...?!

ARMANDO

What do you mean?

NELLA

Aurora and her orchids -- I am beginning to sense that they are the root cause of our affliction.

AURORA

What...?!

NELLA

Something or someone has brought us here, someone has made us the instruments of destiny.

AURORA

An alien!

NELLA

Yes, but who brought the alien?

JUDITH

Just what are you suggesting?

NELLA

With greening comes cunning and a thought I cannot expel from my mind: It is the thought that you, Miss Aurora, have...(*she pauses*)

AURORA

What...?! What do I have?!

NELLA

A great sense of purpose.

JUDITH

Don't be silly; she's too selfish. Sorry, it's not a criticism; you're my daughter and I made you a survivor, not a victim.

AURORA

That's right, you've made me see how fucked up the world really is, and *(to Nella)* just because you're green doesn't mean you won't make everything even worse!

ARMANDO

Aurora, honey, you don't mean...

AURORA

Yes, I do!

NELLA

Ah, then is nobody saved?

AURORA

No.

NELLA

Nobody redeemed?

AURORA

No!

NELLA

Perhaps that is why you wish to be heroic, to rescue us all.

JUDITH

Oh, stop badgering her! And what's she supposed to rescue us from anyway?

NELLA

The plagues of the earth.

JUDITH

Oh, please...

NELLA

So tell me, Miss Aurora, who is really green?

AURORA

Stop it! *(to Armando)* She's done this before!

NELLA

Come, tell us what you are bursting to tell.

AURORA

No! Never! *(starting to leave)* Leave me the fuck alone!!

ARMANDO

(grasping her arm) What is it, Aurora? What do you know?

AURORA

Nothing.

ARMANDO

Whatever it is, darling, it's all right.

AURORA

You'll hate me!

ARMANDO

No, I won't; I'm your father; I'll love you no matter what.

JUDITH

For chrissake, Aurora...

ARMANDO

Believe me, honey, you're safe; I'll never leave you.

AURORA

You already left!

ARMANDO

Never again.

AURORA

(pause, she sighs) The only thing I ever did was I...I sent a message from my transmitter. I...I sent your music and a...message, the same message hundreds of times, but the last time was right before you both passed out.

ARMANDO

What was the message?

AURORA

I said I was sick of the heat, the wars, diseases and the whole human race, but especially of the two of you always fighting, so I wished we could all be as beautiful and harmless as my orchids, and if any aliens were listening, to come take us away from this stupid, fucking planet to...

ARMANDO

(pause) To where...?

AURORA

To one of your if-worlds where we could still be ourselves, only better.

JUDITH

You're kidding? That's it? *(to Armando)* So our despondent daughter makes a plea on a low tech transmitter and thinks she can change the world?! Christ, the wave lengths are too short to reach Cleveland much less hundreds of light years, trillions of miles.

AURORA

Not if they traveled faster than light.

JUDITH

Not possible!

NELLA

All we know for certain is that instead of cultivating despair, your daughter made a garden and crossed a threshold.

JUDITH

Bullshit.

ARMANDO

Oh, Aurora, my dear girl, you *really* think you're responsible?

JUDITH

Well, she's not! She can't be! What aliens would respond to an insignificant little message from an insignificant little girl?!

AURORA

Thanks, mom.

NELLA

No one is insignificant. It is a scientific principle: we observers change the reality of all we observe -- so we cannot help swimming in the oceans of each others lives, affecting the currents of history.

ARMANDO

Oh, Aurora darling, come here.

(ARMANDO gestures to AURORA who approaches him, then screams, backing away!)

AURORA

Your hand! Look at your hand!

JUDITH

Oh, no...

(AURORA and JUDITH back away as ARMANDO reveals his yellowed hand and NELLA unzips his bio-suit.)

NELLA

Now you can shed this preposterous suit!

ARMANDO

Aurora, darling...

AURORA

Don't! Don't touch me! Don't *ever ever* touch me!!

(AURORA runs off.)

JUDITH

Aurora! Aurora, damnit! Come back here!!

(JUDITH dashes after AURORA while ARMANDO sits, crestfallen.)

NELLA

Well, my friend, welcome to the tribe.

ARMANDO

Oh, my god...

NELLA

Take deep breaths like this. Ahhhhhh...

ARMANDO

(pause, breathing deeply) I...I thought I could be the one person who'd never fail her, who'd love her no matter what.

NELLA

Aurora trusts no one: not her doomsday mother, not her father who is greening, not God or the angels or the silver platter of a moon. She thinks no one human can give her what she wants, no one human will ever understand.

ARMANDO

That's it, isn't it? That's the meaning of the message she was sending.

NELLA

It is the message of all who feel abandoned.

ARMANDO

Yes...

(ARMANDO moves to embrace NELLA. Their bodies respond as if electric vibrations were passing from ARMANDO through Nella. After ARMANDO releases NELLA, HE walks away, leaving her stunned.)

NELLA

Who...? Who was it that embraced you?

(Darkness descends.)

SCENE 13

(Dusk on the desert. HOWARD is seated by a camp fire. A COYOTE howls and is joined by HOWARD, howling in harmony. NELLA stands aside, speaking into her phone. Bees and butterflies have attached themselves to her clothing.)

NELLA

Another week has passed, and we observe lizards scurrying up our legs; bees and butterflies are dancing on our heads; and sometimes visible electric fields pass through our pyramid accompanied by a high pitched soprano. We greens wonder if this means our alien is female, and since we are keen to meet her, we try beckoning her with songs, enticing aromas, and all manner of temptations. We continue to keep our greening confidential, but are growing restless.

(HOWARD howls again as NELLA approaches followed by JUDITH.)

JUDITH

For chrissake, what's going on? Stop howling your fool head off!

HOWARD

I'm rejoicing! I'm happy!

JUDITH

Well, keep it to yourself! Aurora's trying to sleep.

HOWARD

Tonight the moon's so bright.

NELLA

Yes, like burning quasar!

JUDITH

Quasars can decimate whole galaxies.

HOWARD

Kill-joy.

JUDITH

It's true. Every time a quasar explodes, millions of planets are obliterated, millions of life forms utterly destroyed.

NELLA

So perilous our precious lives.

(NELLA, and HOWARD huddle closer.)

JUDITH

I realize you've tested antidotes and vaccines on yourselves and nothing's proven effective, so are you giving up? *(to Howard)* Aurora thinks you're becoming a lazy tree hugger like Nella.

NELLA

Lazy am I?! Ha, ha!

JUDITH

Yes! All you do is wander around here with that insipid smile -- like you're some strung out visionary guru.

NELLA

Ah, but I am.

JUDITH

Then envision what will happen if your green paradise rots into something malevolent. You say you're closer to nature, but nature isn't kind. She's full of chaos and destruction.

NELLA

And desire.

(NELLA embraces HOWARD.)

NELLA

Soon the world will be our oyster and we'll never again be slaves. Someday there will be no wars, no orphans, no poverty -- a New Age of Enlightenment!

JUDITH

Yeah, well, the old "Enlightenment" was supposed to bring paradise too. Instead we built gulags, Auschwitz, homicidal theocracies, and elected buffoons to lead the parade. Why will you be any better?

NELLA

Because we know we have immortal souls.

JUDITH

Yeah, then why is it that people who claim to have souls still need enemies to demonize and slaughter? I'll tell you why -- because they're just mortal humans and for humans hostility is inherent -- the primitive limbic system still in action, protecting us from predators. Hatred is our heritage, as natural to the species as breathing.

HOWARD

Believe it or not, Judith, we have better things to do than hate. *(to Nella)* Should we tell her?

NELLA

Perhaps not.

JUDITH

Tell me what?

NELLA

She'll get her knickers in a twist.

JUDITH

Oh, for chrissake!

HOWARD

We're leaving RIDEF.

JUDITH

What...?!

HOWARD

Sayonara, Doc.

JUDITH

Now hold on! What about our strategy, our objectives?!

HOWARD

And your take of the gate? Sorry, but the freak show's hitting the road. We're taking the van and heading for L. A.

NELLA

What an impression we will make when we stop to gas up, ha, ha!

(HOWARD joins NELLA laughing.)

NELLA and HOWARD

Ha, ha, ha!

JUDITH

Stop! For godssake!! Have you any idea what you're doing?! The repercussions?! The reckless lunacy?!

NELLA

Please do not preach caution! How I detest the word! It has written its infamy upon my sorry soul: "Be careful, Nella; be modest, Nella; be humble and hold your tongue." Now I know the true virtues are vitality! Creativity! Courage!

JUDITH

Oh, you'll need plenty of courage.

HOWARD

We'll improvise; we'll say we're a band and the green's a gimmick.

JUDITH

Listen to yourselves! You're like kids on a field trip, but once they're on to you, they'll run you down and put you in a cage -- if they don't lynch you first!

NELLA

You are most amusing, Doctor; I am going to miss you and your daughter.

(ARMANDO enters. HE is now as green as the others.)

HOWARD

Hey, Armando, you're looking good.

JUDITH

They're leaving, but you're staying, right? You promised, Aurora!

ARMANDO

Aurora doesn't want me; she won't even look at me; and you won't touch me, so what's the point of staying?

JUDITH

Oh, Armando, please stay -- all of you! (*pause*) Of course I can't make you. In fact, I confess I envy your attitude, your freedom -- but don't expect to find Utopia on a map.

HOWARD

Not even a star map?

JUDITH

Afraid not.

ARMANDO

Well, you won't know what we'll find unless you come along for the ride.

JUDITH

Me...?

NELLA

Come with us, Doctor Ambers, and Aurora will follow. You see, there is room for every shade and season.

ARMANDO

We even have a shade for dragons.

JUDITH

Why would you want a dragon?

ARMANDO

To light my fire.

(As ARMANDO reaches out to JUDITH, AURORA enters in her pajamas and JUDITH backs away.)

AURORA

What's happening? Why are you all here?

NELLA

We are planning our future.

HOWARD

Stick around, Aurora.

AURORA

Stay back!

NELLA

Your face is sorely missed, and doesn't your father look smashing in green?

AURORA

No! He looked better white, and you looked better black.

NELLA

Ah, Miss Aurora still prefers the old rainbow of colors, but we have new worlds to navigate, which is why we are leaving RIDELF.

AURORA

What...? You can't!

NELLA

Come with us, come lead the revolution you began.

AURORA

I didn't begin anything, and it's not a revolution; it's a genocide! You'd be killing off your histories, your races! *(to Armando)* And you should fucking hate it! You always loved that people were different; it's like having only one kind of orchid.

NELLA

Ah, but that orchid will adapt to every environment. Look at your father. He is still the man who raised you and reveled in your gifts. When are you going to see past his color?

AURORA

Never!

NELLA

Then use your imagination!

AURORA

Back off!

NELLA

Our green creaturely selves can be transcended. The intellect and imagination are the greatest evolutionary triumphs of our species, so we can be anything we wish, inhabit any world we dare to dream, only now the path is smoother: no more racial hatreds to abort our destinies! So please, my dear Aurora, come join our pilgrimage! Come plant the orchard of your dreams!

ARMANDO

We need you, darling; we love you.

AURORA

And I love being white! White! 'Cause that's who I am! And that's who you are, and being green is wrong! It's sick!

HOWARD

It's inevitable!

NELLA

Look at your mother, Aurora, look at her hand.

JUDITH

(gasps) Oh, no, oh, god...

AURORA

Oh, shit!

NELLA

Oh, Doctor Ambers, you will be a sight for sore eyes!

(AURORA steps back, horrified as THEY stare at Judith's yellowing hands.)

AURORA

(glaring at Judith) You are *not* my mother; *(to Armando)* you're not my father and I never want to see either of you ever ever again!!!

(AURORA dashes off as a COYOTE howls. Blackout.)

SCENE 14

(One week later, NELLA speaks into her phone before entering the greenhouse with HOWARD. AURORA is watering her orchids. She is not wearing her bio-suit.)

NELLA

One week later our computers are flashing drawings of an unknown star map, so Judith wonders if the alien is showing us her home. That same day Howard and I enter the greenhouse where Aurora is watering her orchids.

(AURORA startled, drops her watering can.)

AURORA

Shit! You scared me; I really don't want you green beans in here while I'm watering.

NELLA

Howard and I need watering too; we are thirsting for your blessing. We came to see the orchids, and tell you that our alien has sent a map that could be a message. We believe she was summoned by your transmitters, but your mother's receivers may have had an influence as well as your father's music, though Howard wonders if she was drawn to our sculpted beacon. So perhaps it is the synchronicity of all these factors, but who can say for certain.

AURORA

So where's this alien from?

HOWARD

She neglected to leave an address, but now we believe that the whisker was not just a whisker, but the cilia of a seed bearing stalk plucked by the palm of the hand -- if indeed it is a hand.

AURORA

Jesus...

HOWARD

It's possible the alien employed your father's body to deliver her gifts along with the microorganism which penetrated your gloves onto your hand.

AURORA

My hand?!

NELLA

Howard and I believe something highly contagious lodged itself among the millions of bacteria dwelling in a single square centimeter of your palm.

AURORA

But *you're* the ones infected!

NELLA

Yes, and I am the prime carrier, but you, Miss Aurora, may be the host!

AURORA

Oh, fuck...

NELLA

We believe you were chosen -- by fate and the whims of our alien, but I was also chosen -- to pass my verdancy to our weary, warming world.

AURORA

Wait a minute! If I'm the host and I'm not infected, does that mean I'm immune?

HOWARD

Possibly.

AURORA

Then if your antidotes don't work can't we use my blood serum to make one that will? Can't we stop this from spreading?!

NELLA

Yes, perhaps this greening can cease as swiftly as it began.

AURORA

This is awesome! Fantastic! Think of it -- you can be African again! Howard, you can go back to Brooklyn, and Nella can go back to Kenya.

NELLA

Oh, yes, I know I have great things to achieve, but I also have new pleasures you cannot fathom. At this very moment, I feel the greenhouse gases that heat up the planet's heart, and at night, I can hear that heart, and it is beating with the rhythms of my own: dah dum, dah dum, dah dum...

AURORA

Look in the mirror, Nella. Remember when you were black? You were so beautiful then. Please, please let's stop this craziness! *(to Howard)* Make her listen!

NELLA

Decisions like this must not be made hastily. If we create an antidote and only one of us refuses to take it, then the whole world could become...a garden.

AURORA

You have to do it! *(to Howard)* You too and everyone infected!

NELLA

What can I say, Aurora? I am finally savoring the fruits of my powers. After all, I am the mother of a new race; ripe and ready to reclaim the earth!

(NELLA smiles radiantly as the darkness descends.)

SCENE 15

(Five days later in the conference room where NELLA is speaking into her phone as HOWARD and AURORA enter.)

NELLA

Oh, green, fretful green: the first hue of hope, the last tinge of sorrow, the saddest shade of farewell. Five days later we convene again, heavy with the weight of our collective conundrum.

(JUDITH enters accompanied by a green ARMANDO.)

NELLA

Hello! *(to Armando)* How splendid you look!

JUDITH

Aurora, now we're all likely to be affected, but Nella was the first and despite our efforts to dissuade her, she wants to leave RIDELF along with Howard.

AURORA

Then stop them! The antidotes almost ready so no one has to know this ever even happened!

HOWARD

Just because it's formulated doesn't mean it's going to work or that we're willing to use it. Truth be told, we're curious to see what will happen next.

AURORA

What will happen is you'll infect the whole fucking planet!

HOWARD

We're in different phases. Your father's passed denial and is in the nostalgia stage, so he wants his old skin back, but Nella and I are confident, and your mother is leaning towards greening.

JUDITH

I am not! Or am I...?

ARMANDO

Don't look so sad, Aurora. Your mother and I have agreed to stay here at RIDELF, but we shouldn't deny the others the option to leave.

JUDITH

Remember, Aurora, nothing lasts forever; that's the lesson of the stars. They're symbols of constancy, but even they change. Whatever Nella decides, we plan to follow her lead.

AURORA

(to Nella) But you don't know what you'll become! What if you get crazier and weirder, and once word gets out, the freaks will hunt you down and lock you up.

HOWARD

So Nella, what do you want to do?

NELLA

Yes, that is the burning question: what should Nella do? Make a green world of peace or or a multi-colored world at war: what a choice!

HOWARD

Follow your conscience, Nella.

ARMANDO

Follow your heart.

AURORA

Now, please, Nella, take this.

(AURORA slowly places a vial and syringe into NELLA'S hand. THEY stare at each other, then embrace.)

NELLA

I promise to make my decision soon.

HOWARD

How soon?

NELLA

(pocketing the vial) Tonight.

(Darkness descends as stars appear in the desert sky.)

SCENE 16

(NELLA steps forward, standing alone as if staring into a full length mirror.)

NELLA

Now you are gazing into the mirror at your own hungry eyes. Through them you see past the boundaries of time to the dawn of the Great Green Millennium. Yes, the world is blooming, but the human bouquet has no colored blossoms, no shades from the chalkiest white to the deepest umber, and quite frankly, the case for preserving our distinctions is not as compelling as the sweet fragrance of your own verdant flesh. Still, you are reaching in your pocket for the vial of virtue -- the antidote of destiny. You pull it out and stare in a quandary: "What to do?" you ask the Universe, and the Universe replies, "Ah, well..."

(Music as NELLA smiles enigmatically, biting her lip, then uncorks the vial and pours the liquid on the desert sand. SHE walks forward as green lights bleed over the stage, over the audience, over the world, then fade to black.)

End of Play

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Although *The Orchid Lover* is a work of science fiction, the play is also a parable about race. While it may seem encumbered by technical effects, these elements may be suggested by minimal objects and lighting with the details furnished by the imaginations of the audience; however, some green body make-up is essential in order that the audience be inclined to empathize with the visual trauma of the characters becoming a new race.

