

Wild Orchids

(A Gardening Guide to the Galaxies)



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*“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: a black African research chemist; born in Kenya and educated at Oxford, she has a British accent; age 20s

HOWARD GOLDEN: a molecular biologist; age 30s

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

LEONARD AMBERS: Judith's estranged husband; an orchidologist; age 50s

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

TIME

The near future

PLACE

The Mojave Desert; 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, a conference room, and greenhouse. To the side stands a pyramid of incongruous objects welded together: books, screens, keyboards, ironware, earthenware, stones, bones, skulls, and a smartphone on top.

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. SHE gazes at her reflection while recording her experience, speaking with a British accent.)

NELLA

Oh, how this ghastly phone lies! How its mirror fails to reflect beyond the surface of things, beyond the shallow image of myself in the prison of this place. But imagine 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 R-I-D-E-L-F 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 the past, facing her computer as HOWARD reads a list to AURORA.)

HOWARD

Two bogus star maps, one feline brain in formaldehyde, a hard disk 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 hodgepodge 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 mid-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 again 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 taxidermist sent 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 pile.

HOWARD

Yeah. Tell me, doctor, are you still convinced you're not wasting time and money?

JUDITH

You mean *your* time and my money? Everything I own is invested here. Besides you, I employ four full time observers to monitor the radio dish for messages from deep space, and no, I don't think I'm wasting time or money.

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 the Webb telescope spotted light years away in a Goldilocks zone which means there's evidence of water, methane, molecular hydrogen and possible alien microbes. I had a small receiver operating in my office when my husband, Leonard, 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. Leonard woke up in the hospital where he proceeded to forget everything he ever knew, while I am now prone to brain squalls -- better known as migraines.

NELLA

My goodness, what suffering you've endured.

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"? In which case it could be an errant meteor or a weather anomaly, or suppose your receiver malfunctioned.

JUDITH

That's what my colleagues think, and 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 thousands of 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 not introduced themselves?

JUDITH

Oh, I can think of dozens of reasons, but since I really don't know, I'm just 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 could 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 sci fi videos. After a stint at teaching, I figured it was time to head for the Mojave to analyze phony ariel phenomena 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. You, for example, are highly qualified, but also play the piano, and Nella's an accomplished poet and painter. 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 English and Irish. Nella's part Kukuyu and Swahili, and her great grandfather was Portuguese.

HOWARD

And what about Aurora and you, Doctor Ambers?

JUDITH

Aurora's father had a Swedish mother and German father who changed his name from Ambros to Amber. My own father's from Wales, and my mother's French; but my great grandfather was Australian. The cook's Chinese, the cleaners Polish, and my gardener comes from Mexico. 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, she, or they 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 Leonard 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.

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 the vast and bountiful state of California where he will find wise, tolerant people of all creeds and colors.

JUDITH

Oh, please...

NELLA

Yes, here 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 slavery and genocide, and now we're the gun runners of the world with 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?! I hope whoever has him sends *both* hands, his head, and his heart!

HOWARD

Really Aurora...? Is that what you hope?

AURORA

Look, all we want is to prove that someone from somewhere actually exists!

SCENE 3

(Celestial sounds echo as lights reveal the laboratory where AURORA sits staring at a panoply of screens while NELLA speaks 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 UAP web sites.

HOWARD

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

AURORA

I'm not a hacker, but I've got nearly a thousand terabytes of storage on an 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's hot spots, we'll be killing each other for food. 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. My dad knows a physicist 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, and we're all there, only living different lives, and maybe it's not so fucking hot or full of psychos with guns.

(NELLA approaches a 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 flutes."

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 flute music 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 small yellow three-fingered hand. NELLA stands to the side, speaking into her phone.)

NELLA

This morning another box arrived, but the wind knocked down the security cameras and 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.

NELLA

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

HOWARD

Notice 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

But if it's a hand, we could assume it was removed from an 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.

HOWARD

What...?

JUDITH

Are you serious?!

NELLA

I saw an image on a screen in our sculpture.

HOWARD

When?

NELLA

Last night, a vague manly image in yellow.

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 of our pyramid.

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?

AURORA

She was; I saw her!

NELLA

But there was a small hole by the thumb.

AURORA

Oh, shit.

JUDITH

Damn, 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 great grandfather injected his white genes, so you were descended from matings of power inequities, from seductions 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; are 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...

JUDITH

She should be masked and quarantined!

HOWARD

If Nella's infected, then maybe we all are.

AURORA

Nella could be the beginning; what if she's creating a new race...?

HOWARD

What...?

JUDITH

You heard her: a new race!

(lights fade to darkness as a COYOTE howls. The pyramid sculpture pulsates with life as a speaker transmits the music of a flute.)

SCENE 5

(Two weeks later; the conference room where NELLA stands, her entire 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 have the current agenda. *(pause, she sighs)* 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 beyond our videos, 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 UAP network. NASA and SETI know we're looking for ETs, but if anyone suspects we've succeeded, all hell will break loose -- 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 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 infected but that it's taking us 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 only 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 Aurora or me or *(to Judith)* you?

JUDITH

Isn't it obvious? Presumably or at least possibly because Nella'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

That's right, 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

Whoa...

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 -- not to mention our 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 -- kidnapping girls, enslaving women, and forget the computer revolution. In some places it's irrelevant since you can't find a current to charge the damn thing!

AURORA

Can we stick to the agenda?

NELLA

Africa is my agenda! My poor Africa where we envy your prosperity, but even here 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

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

JUDITH

Yeah, sure, but don't pretend that tribal cultures will ever equal our own.

AURORA

Can I leave?

JUDITH

No!

HOWARD

I think it's time we adjourn.

NELLA

No, 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 dining, soft cotton bedding, never mind electric ovens, air conditioning, and computers connecting us to the World Wide Web. 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 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; our pigmentations based on only eight genetic variants in four narrow regions of the human genome.

JUDITH

That may be true, but even your 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. We could even try to inject melanin.

AURORA

She's still looking good.

HOWARD

That's right, you're still beautiful, Nella, still well...proportioned.

NELLA

Yes, my body 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, and we should be feeling sympathy and compassion.

JUDITH

Fine, 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 starts to leave.)

JUDITH

Where are you going?

AURORA

To check my messages.

(AURORA marches off.)

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 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. In fact, she's continuing her education on line and she's already 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 lately. 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 reputable contacts.

NELLA

Why bother? Your 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! From now on I expect you to be masked and wearing gloves whenever you're in close proximity!

HOWARD

It's a little late for that.

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 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 putting 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 breasts are 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 lasting lover, no precious children, no scientific breakthroughs, not even a prize worthy 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

You underestimate yourself, Nella, and I don't think you should leave. Of course 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

(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

Great! 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, *you'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 6

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

NELLA

Howard's lasers and melanin therapies 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.

NELLA

Here she feels rapture and is flushed with joy.

AURORA

It started when Leonard 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 soon we expanded to build our own greenhouse.

NELLA

Oh, Aurora, if it were not for 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!

(NELLA devours an orchid.)

AURORA

Jesus...

NELLA

Now I will blossom! 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 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: fractured 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

My mother...?

NELLA

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

AURORA

Yeah, well, she 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

Now there will be no more tears! I have wept my last and am dry as the rivers that once flowed me to the world. You see, with continued greenness I've become aware of awareness, mindful of everything yet judging nothing. My waves 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... Never mind!

NELLA

What...? What about Howard?

AURORA

Haven't you noticed? He stares at you constantly.

NELLA

Ah, 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, or are you 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. That was years ago and now he is a 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 know that beneath this green flesh are all the dawns and sunsets my child self has 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 skin 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 twelve 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 will I 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

You'd be better off posting on the Internet. Everyone will want to see you; you'd be a viral sensation!

NELLA

Please, do not tempt me with fame and fortune; I am much greedier. What I want is a whole 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 morning doves 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.)

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.

AURORA

Of course you're green! Jesus, look in the mirror! You're here, I'm here, we're *really* here.

NELLA

Then bring me more mirrors -- to observe my transformation. I want them full-length! (*pointing*) One here and another there. You see, with greenness I can feel my senses enlarging. With my green nose I smell the lavender oils your mother rubs into her sun baked body, and with my green ears I hear the mournful melody of a single instrument.

AURORA

Really...?

NELLA

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

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 forgot yourself, ha, ha!

AURORA

Fuck!

NELLA

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 the 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 7

(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 beach chair which she sets upon the desert. SHE wears a bra, shorts, and mirrored sunglasses.)

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 they discharged him yesterday so where the fuck is he?!

HOWARD

Maybe he went to visit friends...?

AURORA

Something's happened, I know it! I think we should call the police or hire detectives!

HOWARD

Why don't you give him another day? Maybe he needed some time alone. (*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. She 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 hatred in her heart. She still has the liberal virtues -- tolerance, compassion, and she wants progress and prosperity, but she wants it for everyone.

AURORA

She's so naive.

HOWARD

Someday she'll be exposed to the world, though I wonder how people will respond to her.

AURORA

They'll think she's a freak.

HOWARD

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

AURORA

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

HOWARD

She'll inspired 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.

HOWARD

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

AURORA

It's spreading up your arm!

HOWARD

I...I'm feeling...sick.

AURORA

Back off! Sorry, but I don't want to get this thing; it's obviously contagious.

HOWARD

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

AURORA

Nella should've been quarantined! Now you have to make an antidote.

HOWARD

Me...?

AURORA

I'm going to start taking pictures; we need a record of your progression.

(AURORA takes out her phone and points the camera at HOWARD. A bright light flashes as NELLA is seen removing her sunglasses and speaking into her phone.)

NELLA

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

(HOWARD stands terrified, stroking the contours of his 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 scents 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!!

(A flash of green is seen as day turns to dusk and dims to night.)

SCENE 8

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

NELLA

Weeks later poor Howard is resigned to his new skin. He insists there is something metaphorical about his mutation, but you tell him he is 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 feel 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, 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 the hidden beauties of nature affecting your very soul. Think of it, Howard: this may be how God sees the world.

HOWARD

You realize you're sounding like some hopped up guru -- a born again on uppers!

NELLA

Shush, relax, and 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 and 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

Oh, 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 dear friend, please let me touch you.

(NELLA stands, extending her arms to HOWARD who backs away as JUDITH enters wearing a protective bio-suit.)

JUDITH

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

(NELLA and HOWARD compose themselves and follow JUDITH as lights dim to black.)

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, so 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 is making us chlorodermic, though who knows how or where to find it among the millions of polymorphisms. But look here, Doctor. *(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: Personally, I think you should remain quarantined. If we do decide to go public, we'll present you to the best molecular biologists in the country, but we need to do it in a completely secure 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

Why? Who did you plan on shooting?

JUDITH

Myself. *(pause)* The gun belonged to my father, and I was depressed after he died. 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 once 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 9

(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.

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

LEONARD

Aurora...?

(AURORA turns and gasps!)

LEONARD

Oh, darling, please don't be afraid.

AURORA

Dad...?

LEONARD

I've missed you.

(LEONARD moves to embrace AURORA who backs away.)

AURORA

How...how did you get here?

LEONARD

As soon as I felt cognizant enough to drive, I rented a car. I was lost for a while, but found my way.

AURORA

I thought you'd forgotten us.

LEONARD

Of course not -- never.

AURORA

Are you okay...?

LEONARD

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

AURORA

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

LEONARD

I see you have a greenhouse.

AURORA

Yeah, but we can't go in unprotected. Follow me and we'll get you suited up. Then I'll give you a tour.

(AURORA leaves, followed by LEONARD.)

SCENE 10

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

NELLA

You and Howard 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 LEONARD enter, both wearing bio-suits.)

JUDITH

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

HOWARD

Hello, Lenny.

NELLA

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

AURORA

Stop!! Don't touch them!

LEONARD

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.

LEONARD

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 as AURORA gestures to
LEONARD.)

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.

LEONARD

I was admiring your pyramid.

HOWARD

Yes, it's a perpetual work-in-progress.

LEONARD

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.

JUDITH

Oh, shush, Aurora!

LEONARD

(pause) So have you become 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 our embedded chlorophyll, we can use light to make carbohydrates, so we don't need to feed on dead plants and animals.

NELLA

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

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?

LEONARD

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

JUDITH

How is it possible to be anything else? How can anyone watching the news be an optimist?

LEONARD

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

JUDITH

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

NELLA

What I saw was ***not*** a mirage, although now I wonder why the professor looks so familiar?

LEONARD

Maybe because your sighting was me. *(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 NELLA stares at LEONARD.)

NELLA

My god... Yes, it could be you, so tell us, Professor, is it possible were you possessed?

LEONARD

What...?

NELLA

Were you possessed by an alien life form?

LEONARD

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

NELLA

Are you certain?

LEONARD

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 are some pictures. Does the hand look familiar?

LEONARD

(pause, staring) The fingers resemble the petals of an orchid...

AURORA

That's what I said!

HOWARD

If you were lost, where do you think you've been?

LEONARD

It seems I still had my flute in my backpack so I walked around Mescalina improvising.

AURORA

When he was in college he played in the band.

NELLA

Then 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 his presence through your music -- to create a cellular susceptibility.

LEONARD

Susceptibility...?

NELLA

To becoming like us. When enough of us are green we will affect the climate, all our industries and agriculture. From multi-cultural chaos to monocultural paradise with one stroke of the brush! We will begin here in Mojave Desert: tree by tree, river by river, city by city, I have a vision, a vision of spring, and I am just beginning to paint the sky! Yes, together we will form the greatest movement of the century, of the millennium! White supremacy will be replaced by green supremacy!

LEONARD

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

NELLA

Yes! 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're attempting to create a treatment or vaccine, but what if they fail and Nella and I leave RIDELF? Suppose we each encounter four new people every day for one week. According to my algorithmic calculations, every man, woman, and child on Earth would be in various stages of epidermal morphosis 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!!

LEONARD

Please, please, stop...

JUDITH

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

NELLA

I am only jesting, Doctor. Though we are greening, Howard and I need you to remain white because you will be the test -- the test of our tolerance for others. Of course, we will protect the remaining pariahs, the genetically unclean ungreen.

JUDITH

Oh, please...

NELLA

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

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

SCENE 11

(One week later at RIDELF where AURORA, JUDITH and LEONARD remain in their bio-suits. AURORA is typing at her computer while JUDITH and LEONARD stare at their computer screens, 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 superior race at RIDELF. After all, snakes are green, and so are sour grapes and poison sumac. As for Leonard: you cannot not believe an alien would reside in a man 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, LEONARD, and NELLA stare at a computer screen)

JUDITH

Howard seems to have recovered from his doldrums.

LEONARD

So this is how you spy on each other?

JUDITH

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

LEONARD

(*to Nella*) Can you tell when you're being watched?

AURORA

Yeah, but they don't give a shit.

LEONARD

I'm asking Nella.

NELLA

Not always.

LEONARD

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

AURORA
No!

JUDITH
No.

JUDITH
(*to Nella*) Though 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 laptop computer and approaches
LEONARD.)

JUDITH
Here's the family album. (*tapping the screen*) This is Nella when we just suspected jaundice, and here you can see her progression to green.

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

AURORA
What?!

JUDITH
What are you saying...?

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

AURORA
No way!

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

AURORA
An alien!

NELLA

Ah, but who summoned the alien?

LEONAR

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!

LEONARD

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 Leonard)* She's done this before!

NELLA

Come, tell us what you are bursting to tell.

AURORA

No! Never! Leave me the fuck alone!!

(AURORA starts to leave but LEONARD grasps her arm.)

LEONARD

What is it, Aurora? What do you know?

AURORA

Nothing! Let go of me!

LEONARD

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

AURORA

You'll hate me!

LEONARD

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

JUDITH

For chrissake, Aurora...

LEONARD

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

AURORA

You already have!

LEONARD

Never again.

AURORA

(pause, she sighs) The only thing I ever did was...

LEONARD

(pause) What...?

AURORA

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.

LEONARD

What was the message?

AURORA

I said I was sick of the wars, the weather, pandemics, 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...

LEONARD

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

HOWARD

Not if they traveled faster than light.

NELLA

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

JUDITH

Bullshit!

LEONARD

Oh, Aurora, my dear, 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.

LEONARD

Oh, Aurora darling, come here.

(LEONARD 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 LEONARD reveals his yellowed hand and NELLA unzips his bio-suit.)

NELLA

Now you can shed this preposterous suit!

LEONARD

Aurora...

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 as LEONARD sits, crestfallen, staring at his hand.)

NELLA

Well, my friend, welcome to the tribe.

LEONARD

Oh, god...

NELLA

Take deep breaths like this. Ahhhhhh...

LEONARD

(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.

LEONARD

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.

(NELLA moves to embrace LEONARD. Their bodies respond as if electric vibrations were passing through them. After NELLA releases LEONARD he walks away leaving her stunned.)

NELLA

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

(Darkness descends.)

SCENE 12

(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 hair and clothing.)

NELLA

Another week has passed, and we observe lizards scurrying up our legs; bees and butterflies are dancing about 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 music, enticing aromas, and all manner of temptations. We continue to keep our greenening among ourselves, but are growing restless.

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

JUDITH

For chrissake, 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 a 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 treatments 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

Well, 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 kisses HOWARD, then turns towards JUDITH.)

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 parades! Why will you be any better?

NELLA

Because we know we have immortal souls.

JUDITH

So why do people who claim to have souls still need enemies to demonize and slaughter? I’ll tell you why -- because they’re just mortal human beings 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)* Isn’t it time to 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 RIDE LF.

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 Vision! Vitality! 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 shoot you first!

NELLA

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

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

HOWARD

Hey, Len, you're looking good.

JUDITH

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

LEONARD

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

JUDITH

Well, I don't suppose I can make you stay...? *(turning to include Howard and Nella)*
I confess I envy you -- all of you -- your attitude, your optimism, but don't expect to find Utopia on a map.

HOWARD

Not even a star map?

JUDITH

Afraid not.

LEONARD

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.

LEONARD

We even have a shade for dragons.

JUDITH

Why would you want a dragon?

LEONARD

To light my fire.

(LEONARD reaches out to JUDITH who backs away as AURORA enters in her pajamas.)

AURORA

What's happening? What are you doing?

NELLA

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 roads 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 genocide! You'd be killing off your histories! (*to Leonard*) And you should fucking hate it! You always loved that people looked different; it's will be like having only one kind of orchid.

NELLA

Ah, but that orchid will be wild and 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 great evolutionary triumph of our species is the intellect! The imagination! 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!

LEONARD

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! Disgusting!

HOWARD

Inevitable! Look at your mother, Aurora, look at her hands.

(JUDITH stares at her hands.)

JUDITH

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

AURORA

Oh, shit!

NELLA

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

(AURORA steps back, horrified.)

AURORA

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

(AURORA dashes off as a COYOTE howls and lights dim to black.)

SCENE 13

(A week later, NELLA speaks into her phone before entering the greenhouse with HOWARD. AURORA has discarded her bio-suit and is watering her orchids.)

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. Howard and I are entering 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 it seems 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...

AURORA

(to Howard) What...? What do you wonder?

HOWARD

What if she was drawn to our pyramid -- our beacon to the cosmos.

NELLA

Or perhaps it's 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 we believe that the whisker was not a whisker, but the cilia of a seed bearing stalk plucked by the palm of 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 and affected your hand.

AURORA

My hand?!

HOWARD

That's right.

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's the one who started this nightmare!

NELLA

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

AURORA

Oh, no...

NELLA

Oh, yes! 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, doesn't that mean I'm immune?

HOWARD

Possibly...

AURORA

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

NELLA

Perhaps...

AURORA

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

NELLA

Ah, yes, we have futures to consider, but we also have current 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 then will we prevent the world from becoming a garden...?

AURORA

We're not supposed to be a garden!

NELLA

All I know is that I am finally savoring the fruits of my powers. Yes, now I am the mother of a new race; ripe and ready to reclaim the Earth!

(NELLA smiles radiantly as darkness descends.)

SCENE 14

(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 LEONARD.)

NELLA

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

JUDITH

We have a dilemma: Despite our efforts, Nella and Howard insist on leaving RIDELF. Personally, I think it's extremely dangerous and they should reconsider.

AURORA

Then we'll stop them! The antidote is 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. Speaking for myself, I'm 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! *(pause)* Am I...?

LEONARD

Don't look so sad, Aurora. Your mother and I have agreed to stay with you at RIDELF.

AURORA

We can't let them leave!

HOWARD

You can't stop us!

AURORA

If I had a gun, I'd shoot you!

HOWARD

Ha, ha!

LEONARD

Stop talking nonsense, Aurora.

JUDITH

Remember, my dear, nothing lasts forever; that's the lesson of the stars. They're symbols of constancy, but even they change.

HOWARD

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 let us remain a multi-colored world at war?

LEONARD

Follow your conscience, Nella.

HOWARD

Follow your heart. Now, please, Nella, take this.

(HOWARD slowly places a small bottle and syringe into NELLA'S hand.)

NELLA

I promise to make my decision soon.

AURORA

How soon?

NELLA

(pocketing the bottle) Tonight.

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

SCENE 15

(NELLA steps forward, approaching the audience as if gazing 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 into your pocket for the curative to greening.

(NELLA pulls out the bottle and syringe from her pocket.)

NELLA

You open your hand 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 uncaps the bottle and pours the liquid onto 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 ***WILD ORCHIDS*** 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.

