

Phantom for Reality

Delaney Porter, Agnes Scott College

Cast of Characters

LENA: a woman in her 60s, intellectual and introspective

JIM: a man in his 70s, Lena's husband, dead

SHANNON: a woman in her 40s, Lena and Jim's daughter, strong and impulsive

ROXY: a woman in her late teens/ early 20s, Shannon's daughter, queer

Place
Lena and Jim's house

Time
present (within 2015-2020), late autumn

I.

Setting: The sitting room of a house. It looks neat and clean, but the furniture and fashion are outdated.

At Rise: A morning ritual: LENA and JIM sit in their respective armchairs. LENA drinks coffee and reads *Orlando: A Biography by Virginia Woolf*. JIM has coffee but does not drink it, and he reads a newspaper.

LENA

(laughing)
"As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking." (continues laughing) Dear, did you hear? As long as she thinks of a man—

JIM

Oh, I heard.

LENA

She makes me laugh.

JIM

Hm?

LENA

Virginia.

(sarcastic)

My dear friend, Mrs. Woolf.

(pause)

Have you ever read anything of hers, dear?

JIM

(slowly)

Not that I can recall.

LENA

Are you sure? Because I—

JIM

I'm sure.

LENA

Why so short with me lately? What's the matter?

JIM

Nothing, dear.

(pause)

Is something wrong?

LENA
Well, it seems as though you're less—you're less like yourself lately.

JIM
Well, you know I'm—

LENA
Yes, I know that, but I mean you used to be so enamored... with books and things. You used to—well, I'm almost sure you've quoted Woolf to me before. Or Sackville-West, maybe.

JIM
I don't recall.

LENA
I think it's funny, the quote.

(LENA returns to reading for a moment but is both uncomfortable with silence and unable to contain her enthusiasm about her reading.)

LENA
(stifling a laugh)
"As the male novelists define it... Love is slipping off one's petticoat!" Oh, dear Virginia.
(to JIM, after a moment)
I know it doesn't interest you, but I think it's absolutely lovely. The way she dismantles and ridicules soci—

JIM
You've read it before, Lena.

LENA
You of all people know that doesn't make a difference.

JIM
It gets tiresome, reading the same text a thousand times over with different students, listening to them having the same things to say a thousand times over...

LENA
I still don't understand how you got bored of your own subject.

JIM
I said tiresome, not bored, my dear. The same thing over every fall. Just got tired.

LENA
Maybe you would've liked literature better than history. Some new stuff every now and again?

JIM
(JIM gestures to LENA's worn, over-read book.)
New, you say?

LENA
Something without age.
(pause)
You almost wish you could be Orlando, you know. You're just a duke with an unfinished poem and a broken romance, and you suddenly wake up a twentieth century woman. Encounter gypsies and an ice age, adventure, time travel...
(LENA looks around her house, realizing how her surroundings and life don't stand up to those of Orlando.)

JIM
It is fiction.

LENA
Fiction. Of course.
(pause)
But romantic, Jimmy.

JIM
Hm.

LENA
You remember romance, Jimmy? Remember when you were ali—I mean, when we were planning on going to Spain? You wanted to see the bullfighters and eat tapas? You used to send me those letters...

JIM
Sure, dear.

LENA
(teasing)
We'll go see El Museo del Prado? Share churros and chocolate in the moonlight.

JIM
Yes, I remember. But I can't do that now.

LENA
I know.
(pause)
You're—I understand. But you wanted to. I bet Orlando's been to Spain. And we're just—

JIM
Lena—

LENA

Dear, you were much livelier in life.

(LENA and JIM pause for a few moments and try to go back to reading.)

I'm sorry.

(pause)

I—I visited your grave yesterday.

JIM

I know. Morning glories. Thank you.

(LENA and JIM continue to read. A moment passes to relieve some tension.)

LENA

“Love is slipping off one’s petticoat...”

(chuckles)

Jim, you always used to think these things were funny.

(LENA pauses, but JIM doesn’t answer.)

Why aren’t you answering me?

(pause)

I think it’s funny. What do you think? You used to tell me what you thought. You always tell me what you think.

JIM

(attempting a chuckle)

I guess it is, a little.

LENA

I mean, more than that. You told me all sorts of funny things. You had read everything. I mean, you do read everything. You still—

JIM

I know. I’m still me. Death doesn’t change that sort of thing.

(LENA and JIM sit in silence for a moment, as if LENA might disagree.)

How is Mrs. Woolf?

LENA

(with a sigh)

“Life, it sings, or croons rather, like a kettle on a hob, life, life, what art thou?”

JIM

Well, hell if I know.

(pause)

How many times do you think you’ve read it?

LENA

(mumbling under her breath)

Not nearly enough times.

(JIM laughs as if he’s not taking her seriously and goes back to reading.)

LENA (CONT.)

“Let us go, then, exploring...”

(LENA pauses and skims the page for a moment. She looks up.)

We’ve stopped exploring, Jimmy.

(She closes the book abruptly and looks expectantly at JIM, who does not look up.)

JIM

What do you mean, dear?

LENA

I think I’m going to run a bath.

(LENA rises and exits. JIM doesn’t look up.)

II.

Setting: A bathroom in the house.

At Rise: LENA is taking off her clothes and stepping into the bathtub. The scene should move slowly with pauses where appropriate and much meditation on LENA’s part.

LENA

(mimicking JIM)

“I’m still me...” That’s not the old Jim... “Death doesn’t change anything...”

(LENA stops as she settles into her bath. LENA’s thought of what she feels is the winning line to an argument that she thought of too late.)

LENA (CONT.)

Death is change, the bastard.

(LENA calms down and begins to read letters from a younger JIM. Perhaps they’ve been tucked in the pages of her book. The pages are old. This is habitual.)

LENA (CONT.)

“My dearest darling...” He used to be so damn sentimental. “I miss your soft skin. I miss holding you in my arms every night, my love. I feel so empty now without you...”

(LENA begins to tear up. She flips to another letter.)

“When I finally come home, let’s honeymoon in Spain.

You've heard of Madrid and Barcelona, I'm sure, with all that reading you do."

(laughs)

"I want to love you in the Spanish heat and listen to everything you feel about the art and the literature, the bullfighting and dancing. Let's learn Spanish, my darling. Te quiero. I love you. J."

(LENA is crying. She puts the letters aside on a table or floor. She slowly recovers.)

LENA (CONT.)

I miss him.

(LENA relaxes and reclines in the tub, maybe putting her head back. She breathes slowly and deeply, stopping herself from crying. She begins to mess with the water a bit, as one might do when alone and thoughtful, by making waves and ripples. She traces designs or words on herself with the water, eventually going to touch herself. She stops abruptly, feeling embarrassed and guilty. She looks toward the room where Jim might be. She returns to the letters.)

LENA (CONT.)

"I want to love you in the Spanish heat and listen—"

(LENA's cell phone rings. She isn't expecting a call. She reaches for it and answers with a start.)

LENA (CONT.)

Shannon?

SHANNON

Mom—hey, how's your morning?

LENA

Um, good, yeah. I've just been reading.

SHANNON

You alright? You sound distracted.

LENA

(LENA puts the letters down.)

Yes, I'm just fine. How're you doing?

SHANNON

Oh, I'm great. I—Roxy's back for the weekend and I was wondering if you wanted to see her? It's been a while since you two—

LENA

That sounds wonderful. You're right; it's been too long.

SHANNON

Great, so you're free?

LENA

Well there hasn't exactly been a lot on my schedule lately.

SHANNON

Right, since Dad—

LENA

I'll cook.

(LENA begins to stand and wrap a towel around herself.)

LENA (CONT.)

I have some tomatoes from Wednesday's farmer's market. I didn't know what to do with them, but they're gorgeous. Maybe some caprese or spaghetti and—

SHANNON

Perfect, Ma.

(pause)

Thank you.

LENA

Can I expect you around five?

SHANNON

Five? Is that when you eat? Holy— Never mind. We'll be there at six.

LENA

I love you. I can't wait to see you both.

SHANNON

Love you. We'll be there, Ma.

(SHANNON hangs up. LENA laughs a bit as she dresses.)

III.

Setting: The dining room of the house. Some hours have passed.

At Rise: LENA, ROXY, SHANNON, and JIM sit at a table mid-dinner. There is no place setting for Jim and he does not eat.

SHANNON

Well, I wasn't in Bangkok the whole time; they wanted me to write about the waterfalls on Ko Kut. A small island off the coast?

LENA

And you didn't speak the language?

SHANNON

Yeah, they speak Thai there. I mean, I picked up a few words and I met a few English speakers, but yeah, Thai.

LENA

Goodness, I'd love to do something like that.

JIM

No, you don't, love. Sounds unsafe.

(LENA looks at him sternly. ROXY and SHANNON are confused at what she is doing.)

JIM (CONT.)

What? She could get hurt.

ROXY

One of my friends says that if she could have one superpower, she'd want to speak every single language. So she could connect with anyone, she says.

LENA

Wise girl. I'd like to think we have something in common.

ROXY

Did you ever learn any?

LENA

I learned some Latin in school when I was young, but it never really came in handy. I don't remember much now. Later, I learned enough Spanish to keep up with your grandfather.

(to SHANNON)

Your dad and I were going to—

JIM

(dismissing)

Why do you keep bringing that up, dear? That's an old fantasy.

LENA

Are you taking a language class at that college of yours?

ROXY

Yeah, Mandarin, actually. And I was thinking of picking up Arabic too.

LENA

Sounds like you're doing good in school.

JIM

(stern)

Better than Shannon ever did.

LENA

(joking)

Better than your mom ever did.

SHANNON

(slightly offended, but laughing)

Yeah, well I hope so.

(pause)

Did Rox tell you she got all A's last semester? She's—

ROXY

Thanks, Mom.

JIM

(laughing)

Sounds like she's got her brains from us.

LENA

(trying to make Roxy more comfortable)

Sounds like you take after your grandfather. I'm sure he would've been pleased to hear that. He was always so obsessed with academics, you know, as much as he liked to complain about teaching...

ROXY

Oh, I wouldn't say I'm obsessed or anything, I just like my classes...

LENA

Well, I'm glad, dear. Are you still thinking of going into architecture?

ROXY

Yeah, I've been taking some of the courses this semester. They're really—

SHANNON

Rox, tell Lena about your formal.

JIM

Since when does she call you by your first name?

LENA
Since you—

(She realizes it appears she's talking to ROXY and SHANNON, as they can't see or hear JIM.)

LENA (CONT.)
Never mind. Sorry. Do tell?

SHANNON
You okay, Mom? You seem like you're being pulled in a million directions.

LENA
No, yes. A few directions, but I'm just fine. What was it about a formal?

ROXY
Oh, it's really not a big deal.

LENA
Of course it is!
(to SHANNON)
Why? Does she have a dashing, young date?

SHANNON
(laughing)
I'd say so! She's got a special someone.

JIM
It's about time, isn't it? I can't recall her ever having a boyfriend.

LENA
Oh, that's lovely. I knew Roxy would find a nice man eventually.

(ROXY looks deeply uncomfortable.)

ROXY
Well, they are very nice. We were lab partners in physics and then one day they asked if they could sit with me at lunch and we hit it off. I had a crush on them for a while and then—

SHANNON
They asked her out! Isn't that adorable?

ROXY
And then they asked me out and so we've been a thing for a while and I think we might... love each other? It's been a few months now and I wanted to tell you. They asked me last week to go to the formal.

JIM
"They"?

LENA
I'm so happy for you, dear.

JIM
Aren't you going to ask about it?

LENA
Glad you finally found someone you like.

JIM
Lena—

LENA
(careful)
Um, dear, did you mean "him," before? You had a crush on him?

ROXY
(very tense)
Not exactly. No.

JIM
(confused, a little angry)
I can't believe my granddaughter's—

SHANNON
Go ahead, love.

ROXY
Not really a "him." Not a "her" either, sort of in the middle? Or not on that spectrum at all, you know? They're non-binary. They don't really fit either gender.

(There is a pause where LENA tries to understand and craft a reaction.)

SHANNON
(softly)
Ma?

LENA
(suddenly)
Like Orlando? Maybe you've read that?

ROXY
No—I don't think I have.

LENA
By Virginia Woolf. It's about this character named Orlando. He—She is—They are a nobleman in the seventeenth century who takes a very long nap--

LENA (CONT.)

--and wake up a woman. But some scholars are unsure how to refer to them, since they go through such a change. But for one or two sentences, Woolf refers to Orlando with the singular "they." So it's like that? Maybe? That space between Orlando as a man and as a woman.

(During this, LENA rises and finds her book. She flips to a dog-eared page.)

LENA (CONT.)

And there's this one passage... "For the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each."

(LENA looks up expectantly. ROXY rises and crosses to LENA on the next line.)

ROXY

Sort of! I mean, yes. People have lots of different words for it, now. Words that are all a little different. To fit them. But, yes.

(ROXY, relieved, hugs LENA.)

ROXY

Thank you for trying to understand. For understanding.

JIM

Words, words. But what are they really? I mean, what's... you know...

LENA

(under her breath)

That doesn't matter.

ROXY

What?

LENA

Nothing. I'm so glad I could. I'm so glad you found someone you like and who really cares about you.
(She looks meaningfully at JIM.)

JIM

Fine. If you're okay with your granddaughter being queer...

(It is unclear if JIM uses the word "queer" in the derogatory sense.)

LENA

And what about you? Is it okay if I use "she" for you?

ROXY

(so relieved)

Yes, yes. I can't believe you're being so cool about this.
(pause)

Thank you.

(pause)

There's something else too. While I'm at it.
(laughs weakly)

I'm, um, bisexual. Meaning I don't just like guys.

LENA

Well, I figured. I'm so glad you felt safe enough to tell me.

JIM

You figured? Did you know? You're allowing this? She just said she does like men. Why can't she find one of those? Not this—this—

ROXY

Thank you for making me feel safe.
(ROXY is looking at SHANNON.)
I feel so much better.

SHANNON

(trying to lighten the mood)

Didn't know you could be so progressive, Mom.

JIM

Lena—
(JIM stands.)

LENA

No, I support you. I understand. I want you to feel like you can tell me anything. Thank you for telling me. Now, I'll want to see pictures of you two at the formal. Promise you'll send some?

ROXY

Of course I will.

JIM

Lena, you don't want to condone this. What if she gets hurt? Made fun of?

LENA

It's who you are. Your friends, are they...?

(ROXY is confused about the direction of the conversation.)

ROXY
My friends know. They have known. Some of them are too.

LENA
(looking at JIM)
So, you'll be safe. Not bullied or—

ROXY
No, I mean, no one really cares in college.

(ROXY looks in JIM's direction, following LENA's gaze, but doesn't see him.)

ROXY (CONT.)
I was more worried about telling you.

LENA
Sweetheart, you didn't have to worry about that. Thank you for—

ROXY
Do you think Jimmy would've been okay with it too?

LENA
(careful)
He was a wise man. I do have hope he would have.

(JIM sits.)

SHANNON
You think? I'm not—

LENA
Yes. I do hope. He was... interested in new ideas. Don't forget he was still surrounded by youth in his old age.

(pause)
We were kindred spirits. I like to hope he would've understood.

JIM
I hate when you talk about me in the past tense.

LENA
I guess we won't know for sure, since he's moved on.

ROXY
Thank you for hoping. For me.

JIM
That's bullshit. I care about her, dear, I do. I just want the best for her. Is this the—

LENA
Tell me again how you two ended up together?

ROXY
Their name is Jamie...

(The dialogue fades out with the scene, whether through lights or a rotation of the stage.)

IV.

Setting: The living room, later in the night.

At Rise: After dinner, ROXY is reading on the floor. On the other side of the room, LENA and SHANNON drink and reminisce about JIM.

SHANNON
Do you miss him at all?

LENA
Yes and no. Sometimes I feel as though he's still here. Other times, he feels so far away.
(LENA tries to change the subject.)
And you? Joseph?

SHANNON
No, Ma. It was way different than you two. We both wanted different things. I think it's better now. I'm better. I needed to be alone for a while. But you didn't really choose that, you know?

LENA
No, but I've been thinking. Maybe I do need some time alone. I mean "did," did need.

SHANNON
I'm glad you can think of it that way.
(pause)
I always thought he kind of weighed you down.

LENA
No—well, I don't know. Maybe. I loved him so much. I didn't want to ever leave him; he was my everything, my... heaven. Do you remember that part in Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam" where he describes his version of heaven, of the perfect afterlife?

SHANNON
You know I haven't read everything you have.

LENA

He wrote that when he died, his heaven would be an eternal spring day with his lover, well, “friend.”

(pause)

I thought it might be like that with me and Jim. I felt as if I wanted to sit in this room with him forever. Just stay here and love each other in this home we’ve made together.

SHANNON

Is that still what you want?

LENA

I don’t know. I mean, maybe? Maybe if Jim— Maybe I need to leave here to come back. Yes?

SHANNON

It sounds like you’ve made up your mind.

LENA

I guess I have. I’ve been thinking about traveling. About taking the honeymoon trip your father and I never got to take? The college got in the way. Then all that research in the summer, the books we wrote and read, and well, we never found the time. Don’t get me wrong, I loved teaching—

SHANNON

I don’t think you’ve ever told me about it. The honeymoon.

LENA

Really? I feel like the fantasy of it is never far from my mind. We were going to go to Spain together.

(A pause. LENA begins to tear up. Her voice cracks.)

LENA (CONT.)

I miss him, Shannon. I don’t think it’ll be the same without him.

SHANNON

I know. I understand.

(During SHANNON’s next lines, JIM walks in. He looks like he might try to comfort LENA, but goes to read over ROXY’s shoulder instead. ROXY has been listening discreetly to the conversation.)

SHANNON (CONT.)

I can give you some travel tips, get in touch with some friends who’ve been there and who teach Spanish. I think I’ve already got some pages saved, though I’ve never been there myself...

(LENA is trying to save face with JIM in the room, but she is still tearing up.)

LENA

Thank you, sweetheart. I really might take you up on it.

(pause)

You’ve never been? With all those places you—

SHANNON

No, they really only send me to Asia, but I’ve been to Australia a few times. But never Europe—I guess it’s the more “coveted” position, you know? But I like writing about—

(ROXY realizes that something’s bothering LENA.)

ROXY

Mom, maybe we should go soon? It’s late and I’ve got class in the morning.

SHANNON

You’ll be okay, Lena? I don’t want to leave you here if—

LENA

(smiling weakly)

No, I’m just fine. Roxy’s right: you two should get some sleep.

(ROXY and SHANNON gather their things to leave.)

SHANNON

Okay, but you’d let me know?

LENA

Of course.

SHANNON

Okay, Ma. Check your email. I’ll send that travel stuff over.

(SHANNON and LENA hug and maybe kiss on the cheek.)

LENA

I will, love.

(to ROXY)

And thank you, my dear, for being so brave.

(ROXY and LENA hug tightly.)

ROXY

I love you.

LENA

I love you too. Thank you so much for coming over. It's been delightful to see you. And to have some company.

(ROXY and SHANNON leave through the front door. LENA calls after them.)

LENA (CONT.)

Farewell! Sleep tight!

(LENA closes and locks the door. She pours herself a drink and then sits in her armchair, the same position as this morning. JIM starts.)

JIM

I'm not pleasing company, I suppose.

LENA

It was rude of you to interrupt me like that. And to distract me like that, and when the discussion was so important?

JIM

Well, were you listening to yourself at dinner? You hope I'd be "okay" with—with— oh, you know. What kind of talk is that?

LENA

I would hope you'd support your granddaughter no matter what you think of it. It's not hurting anything.
(pause)

Even if she doesn't know, I—
(pause)

I do think— I think she would've wanted your approval.

JIM

Please stop speaking of me as if I'm not right here, in the present.

LENA

You're not, you're not. You're—

JIM

Dead, I know. I know. But I'm here, with you. I'm still me.

LENA

(LENA blurts out something she's been holding back.)
Are you?

JIM

Yes, I am. What's wrong with me wanting things to stay as they were? As they've always been? Male, female. That's it, Lena.

LENA

Not if some people aren't. And anyway, you shouldn't talk like that. We're talking about your granddaughter's happiness and wellbeing. You're being selfish. Closed-minded!

JIM

But why can't it be like when Shannon was little? When we were sure she'd marry Joseph down the street?

(JIM sits in the second armchair.)

LENA

Shannon's an adult and has been for some time now. And you see how that turned out? With Joseph? Some people aren't cut out for—Some people don't want—

JIM

But remember how happy we were? Why can't it be like that again?

LENA

Because it isn't. Because you're—you're different.

JIM

Dead?

LENA

Actually, no. Not that. Not even that.
(pause)

You once told me you lose your youth the moment you decide you can't change any more. I think you've lost it. You're... old. You've stopped learning.

(pause)

A second death, my dear.

JIM

You feel I've died again.

LENA

Change is good, especially when it's for the people you love most.

JIM

We were happy. We didn't need change!

LENA

Yes, "were."

LENA (CONT.)

(pause)

I haven't been happy for some time.

(pause)

But you know that.

JIM

I'm here.

LENA

No. Not really here, my love. Not really.

(LENA begins to tear up.)

I miss you.

JIM

You don't have to miss me.

LENA

You wouldn't act this way. I know—knew you.

(LENA begins to cry.)

You were so kind. And romantic. You wrote me—do you remember those long, long letters? Do you know I read them over again every day?

(pause)

We were going to travel. You were—

JIM

Why aren't I allowed to change too?

LENA

You are! For the better. You're being narrow and—
and—

JIM

You're the one with this idea of me in your head!

LENA

You're being ridiculous, Jimmy.

JIM

I'm not! I'm being reasonable. I want things to be—

LENA

But what about me? I want to travel, I want to be in love again, I want you to—

JIM

Lena—

LENA

Don't you realize I'm becoming a ghost too? I'm trapped in this house with—

JIM

No one's keeping you here.

LENA

I'm keeping myself. With—with you. These letters. These memories. This gh—

JIM

I'm not just a memory!

LENA

Every day it seems like it more and more, my dear.

(pause)

You should be. Why did you come back?

JIM

I wanted to sit here, with you, for as long as I could. Wanted to stay with you forever. Isn't that what we wanted? We can still—

LENA

We can't. You do know that? You're dead, Jim, and it's about time we face it. We're not as we were. Even when we were like we were, we weren't static! Yes, we would sit here in these chairs, but we moved forward in time and in ideas and in our love. And you would laugh at the things I read you and you would have things to say about them and our lives would move forward together. I can't keep doing this. I—Maybe, after—

JIM

You want me to leave.

LENA

No, I know you'll always be here.

(pause)

I should go.

JIM

(after a long pause)

Will you come back?

(JIM pauses. He realizes this is not the right question.)

Will you find someone else?

LENA

Maybe. You're the great love of my life, Jimmy. But maybe. Maybe it'd be nice to share a bed with someone warm and tangible again. To hold a kind hand.

JIM

He'll be a lucky one.

LENA

Maybe. Maybe I'm like Roxy. I didn't know that was a thing someone could be. Heard of it, yes, but never considered it for myself.

JIM

You don't mean that, dear.
(pause)
Why can't you just stay?

LENA

I don't feel alive, living like this. Overthinking the meanings of the flowers I put on your grave, or being afraid to touch myself because I'm embarrassed that you're in the next room, or pouring morning coffee for two and drinking both mugs myself. I want something other than this same damn lonely day over and over.

JIM

I love you.

LENA

I know that. And I loved you.

(LENA stands.)

LENA

But it's different now that you're gone. You're different. You're—I need more. I should do more for myself. I don't want to be a living ghost.

(Out of compulsion, LENA flips through her copy of Orlando that sits on a table in the living room. She just reminded herself of something. She lands on a dogeared page.)

LENA (CONT.)

"It was the fatal nature of this disease..."

(LENA gestures to the space around her, referencing the situation.)

LENA (CONT.)

"to substitute a phantom for reality."

(As LENA goes to put the book down, she goes to touch JIM on the shoulder or hand.)

LENA (CONT.)

You see, dear?

(LENA realizes all over again that JIM isn't corporeal and is dead. She pulls her hand back slowly in grief.

A moment passes in which they both recognize JIM's situation before JIM speaks.)

JIM

I can't stop you, can I? You've made up your mind.

LENA

Yes, I believe I have. That's what Shannon said to me, you know.

JIM

You've always been a step ahead of me, Lena.

(LENA shakes her head and smiles.)

You know I can't follow anymore? Not like this.

(pause)

Will you be okay? Without me?

LENA

Yes, I do think I will be.

(The scene ends with a fade to black or a full rotation of the stage.)

V.

Setting: The living room, again. A day or two has passed. A piece or two of dusty, long-unused-until-now luggage sits by the door.

At Rise: JIM is still sitting in his armchair. LENA is putting on a coat. JIM is stressed and anxious for LENA, who is calm and content.

JIM

Do you think you have everything? Passport and—

LENA

Yes, yes, everything, my dear.

(pause)

Thank you. For living and... reliving this life with me.

JIM

But there's more for you. Out there?

(JIM gestures toward the door.)

LENA

Yes, for now. More life. And—and love. If I'm lucky.

(LENA messes with her baggage and her coat. A moment passes as JIM accepts this statement.)

JIM

Where are you going? So I can imagine you there.

LENA

I'll... tell you when I come back, Jimmy. I'll be coming back, you know.

(LENA exits through the door. JIM is left sitting in his armchair.)

JIM

(softly)

I'll be here, waiting.

(JIM accounts for his surroundings and grieves for LENA. He is alone for the first time in a long time. Once he recovers a bit, he notices that LENA left her copy of Orlando for him. He starts at the beginning. He smiles.)

Epilogue

Setting: The living room again, six years later. There are boxes and books scattered around the room.

At Rise: SHANNON and ROXY are sorting LENA and JIM's things.

SHANNON

(holding up a book)

Can you believe they kept all this shit?

ROXY

I think it's sweet, you know? They kept a record.

SHANNON

Of everything they ever read? Between the two of them, we could start a damn library.

(ROXY laughs.)

SHANNON (CONT.)

Are you keeping anything for yourself?

ROXY

I'd love to take it all, but Jamie and I don't exactly have room in that apartment of ours.

(SHANNON laughs.)

ROXY (CONT.)

You've seen it! You can barely see the shelf anymore under all those books. You?

SHANNON

Just their letters.

(pause)

Did you know they were really romantic? Jim always knew just what to say. I didn't ever know—

ROXY

I had no idea.

(JIM walks into the room from the door leading to the dining room/kitchen. He seems content and expectant.)

ROXY (CONT.)

I mean I was young, but he always seemed so—

SHANNON

Well, he did marry your grandmother.

(JIM smiles.)

ROXY

(sighs)

Oh, Lena. Academic, world traveler, book collector...

SHANNON

(laughing)

That should've been in her obituary. Died in Morocco of heart complications. Proudest accomplishment was acquiring a first edition copy of *Franny and Zooey*.

(pause)

Is it too soon to be laughing like this?

ROXY & JIM

Not if it helps.

SHANNON

She would've laughed, I hope.

(pause)

But, Lord, it is a lot of books.

(A pause. LENA walks in the front door. She doesn't carry anything. SHANNON and ROXY carry on sorting books and other items as if the front door hasn't opened and as if LENA isn't in the room.)

JIM

I didn't know whether you'd come back.

LENA
(smiling)
Neither did I.

JIM
(unsure whether he wants to know the answer)
Why did you?

LENA
I thought maybe... we could try again. I—I loved you. I do love you. Maybe we can, maybe—

JIM
You went to Spain?

LENA
(relieved to be interrupted)
Yes, I thought it was quite literary of me. To go to the place we were going to honeymoon.
(pause)
I needed to grieve you properly... So I could keep living.

JIM
I'm sorry.

LENA
You don't need to be. I just needed time. I was being impatient. I—

JIM
No, Lena. I understand now.

LENA
(hesitant)
You... do?

JIM
Look at how happy she is.
(JIM and LENA watch SHANNON and ROXY for a moment.)

JIM (CONT.)
They've been here the last few days. And they visited before that, to take care of the house while you were gone. Just in case you came back.
(pause)
You know, I didn't—I couldn't see them as they were, only as I wanted them to be.
(pause)
Roxy has so much love in her. I could never get in the way of that. And to think I—if I weren't... gone, I would have pushed her away. I'm so... mad at myself

for that. I wouldn't ever want to make her feel unloved, but I would have. I only wanted to protect her. I would've pushed her away instead. I've had so much time to think, Lena.

(LENA gets closer to JIM and takes his hand. This is the first time they've been able to touch each other since JIM died.)

JIM (CONT.)
I'm so proud of her for loving so honestly and—and for telling you! Those years ago. You understood so clearly. You... related. I just didn't want to face it.
(pause)

I always thought queer was such a bad thing to be—My parents never—I mean, I was so scared for her.

LENA
You were doing what you thought was right. You didn't know—

JIM
I should have known. I should have been better.

LENA
I did have hope, my love. Remember?

JIM
I remember.
(pause)
I thought about you all the time. Well, how could I forget?

(JIM pauses and gestures around the house, lingering on ROXY and SHANNON packing books.)

JIM (CONT.)
I read everything you wrote in the margins.

(LENA is overwhelmed and kisses JIM. A moment passes.)

JIM (CONT.)
I missed you so much, my dear.

LENA
I'm so glad you—

JIM
Did you ever find anyone else?

LENA
Yes. Well, I had a few flings at first. It had been so long, Jimmy.

LENA (CONT.)

(pause)

And then there was Elise. We moved in together in Madrid. I—

JIM

Did you love her?

LENA

Yes. Yes, Jimmy. We were in Morocco when I—

JIM

I know.

LENA

I thought about you all the time. And then some days I didn't. It was good. To live again. But once I— well, I couldn't stay.

(pause)

I told you, Jimmy: you're the great love of my life. Isn't that silly of me? To trust love so much? To trust all those years we spent together? I knew how you reacted to Roxy but I still—

JIM

I was ignorant. I—I would never want to hurt either of you.

LENA

I thought I could change you. Is that dumb? I thought maybe... I don't know.

JIM

I can't believe you would come back for me. I'm—

LENA

I wouldn't want to spend my... death any other way. I wanted to try again.

JIM

So did I. I decided to learn again, Lena.

LENA

I love you, you know that?

SHANNON

Look what I found!

(SHANNON holds up Orlando.)

ROXY

Let me guess, a book?

SHANNON

Yes, but look, Rox.

ROXY

Oh! Oh, I remember that one. Lena...

SHANNON

I remember her reading this when I was little. Seems as though she flipped right to the first page again when she finished.

(ROXY takes the book and flips to a random page, reading underlined text.)

ROXY

“And she would be buried here, she reflected, kneeling on the window-sill in the long gallery and sipping her Spanish wine. [...] She, who believed in no immortality, could not help feeling that her soul would come and go forever with the reds on the panels and greens on the sofa...”

SHANNON

She write anything?

ROXY

Yeah... “Like Tennyson: My heaven. With him.”

JIM

(understanding the reference)

I love you too.