

# **Sapphic Queens**

**by Lilly Axster**

**English translation: Erika Doucette**

**A play for four actresses**

## **Virginia Woolf**

... and in another role as  
Audre Lorde's daughter

## **Djuna Barnes**

... and in other roles as  
Vita Sackville-West  
Audre Lorde's son

## **Audre Lorde**

... and in other roles as  
Thelma Wood  
Leonard Woolf

## **Ellen Degeneres**

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**Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde and Djuna Barnes**

- Virginia I'm sitting in an old silk petticoat at the moment with a hole in it and the top part of another dress with a hole in it, and the wind is blowing through me.  
(Pause)
- Virginia There is her maturity and full breastedness: her being so much in full sail on the high tides, that she blows me away...
- Djuna A woman?
- Audre A woman?
- Virginia What an enchanted world.
- Djuna Finally.
- Audre (sings)  
Somewhere over the rainbow...
- Virginia She stalks on legs like beech trees, pink glowing, grape clustered, pearl hung ...
- Djuna Who could that be?
- Audre Do it, Virginia.
- Djuna Who is she?
- Audre Do it.
- Virginia Vita. Vita Sackville-West.
- Djuna Oh no. A married woman, a mother and her unbelievable breeches.
- Virginia It's all quite sensual and splendid and absurd.
- Audre Do it.
- Virginia I am sitting up in bed: I am very, very charming, and Vita is my little dear, old rough coated sheep dog.
- Djuna That's no way to go about it.
- Virginia Vita, my dear donkey West.
- Audre Just do it.

Djuna            Let's say you are sitting on the couch. There's something electric in the air. Flowers stretching forth from the vase, open in full bloom, Vita's hat curiously resting on the mantle, the fragrance of promise in the air. You take her hand, kiss her palm, nestle your nose into her soft hand. Caress your face with her fingers, guide them lightly across your lips, then close your eyes.

Virginia        Ah, if you want my love for ever and ever –

Djuna            Shush.

Virginia        – you must break out into spots on your back.

Djuna            Audre, say something.

Audre          What good is a rash?

Djuna            Pounce onto her lap,  
                  feel for her breasts,  
                  take off her – or your – clothes.

Audre          It also depends on the sofa.

Virginia        It's a rather short one with armrests on both sides.

Audre          Tell her sweet things.  
                  Entice her with your words.

Djuna            Wait a minute –

Virginia        You must come tomorrow, donkey West. Come early and we'll stick stamps or see fish –

Djuna            Don't talk. It would be better if you didn't.

Audre          Talk to her. Tell her where your fingers are.  
                  On her. In her.  
                  Talk is sexy.

Djuna            No, no. By no means should you talk.

Virginia        I want her, clearly and distinctly.

Audre          Do it.

Djuna            Don't neglect the feet, there's sensuality below the cunt  
                  Foot soles brush breasts, nipples tickle balls of feet,  
                  explore the skin,

between toes, along the soles.  
She extends herself toward you, wanting more.

Virginia Every nerve is running fire –

Djuna Roll about with her, on top of her –

Virginia That would never work with this sofa.

Djuna Over the armrest. Onto the floor.

Virginia You'll never shake me off, no matter how hard you try.

Djuna Sit on her belly – backwards.

Audre Heavy breathing.

Djuna Her clitoris before you, small, red and keen.

Virginia How many have you seen?

Djuna Don't dare ask her that.  
And don't rhyme. Never rhyme.  
If she's into dildos, leather, or toys  
we'll have to go out and get some.

Virginia She lives in a castle.

Djuna Be her Prince Charming.

Audre Do it.

Virginia If it were feasible for you, and you had no lovers friends, mothers, poisoned dogs or young men in the house, then I should be divinely happy.

Djuna We'll have make sure their husbands are busy.  
Vita's husband is gay. What about Leonard?

Audre Who cares? Send them off to the sauna and you two can ride up to the castle.

Virginia You be a careful Dolphin in your gambolling, or you'll find my soft crevices lined with hooks.

Djuna Mon dieu.

(Pause)

Virginia Never have I, with a woman –

Audre            You have loved many women.

Virginia        If you break a leg, I break my heart.  
Don't tell me this is an illusion.

Audre            Do it, Virginia.

Djuna            If not, two years from now you'll still be sitting here with Leonard at five o'clock tea, talking about prosimians and stamps and longing for Vita under the couch.

Virginia        What was seen begun – like two friends starting to meet each other across the street – was never seen ended.  
Do you really exist? Have I made you up?

Djuna            Mais non. Merdel

(Silence)

Virginia        Why should I not come and spend the night alone with you?  
Without the two of you. Alone.

**Thunder. Lightning. Thunder storm.**

**Museum of Famous Women**

**Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde and Djuna Barnes  
in "typical" poses.**

**Portrait of three individualists. Idols. Icons.**

**Silence, only sounds of the storm.**

Virginia        Are you awake?

Djuna            How could we sleep with that storm out there?

Virginia        I had a dream. About you.

Djuna            What was it like?

Virginia        Intriguing. You two gave me advise.

Audre            About what?

Virginia        Vita.

Djuna            Were we good?

Virginia        Yes.

Audre            So – what's up now?

Virginia        Thunder and lightning.

Djuna            Starry-eyed romantic.

Virginia        It will pass.

Audre            Too bad.

Virginia        I'm afraid of the night.

Djuna            Sleep now.

Virginia        I can't.

Audre            Go back to your dream. We'll to be there with you.

Virginia        My head. I can't tell if I'm standing on my head or my heels.

Audre            Virginia. It's the thunderstorm.

Virginia        My thoughts are no longer clear.

Audre         You don't need to think right now. It's nighttime.

Virginia       I hear voices.  
                  Not in my dreams. Not yours.  
                  My head.

Audre         Everything's gonna be just fine. Djuna's here. And so am I.  
                  The thunderstorm will pass over.  
                  Now let's go to sleep.

Virginia       This is the last night.

Djuna         Don't say things like that. You hear? Don't say things like that.

Virginia       I fought against it, but now my strength is gone.

Audre         Listen here, Mrs. Woolf.  
                  This is not the last night.  
                  This is a night like any other.

Virginia       Don't say things like that. You hear?  
                  What's wrong?  
                  With me?

Djuna         An exhilarating dream about Vita.  
                  You should just carry on with your sweet dream.  
                  Enjoy something for once. Just once.

Audre         You are stirred up from all those memories, from the thunderstorm,  
                  just go back to sleep.

Virginia       My head. My head. Like cotton draped over everything. Dimming.  
                  The thunder off in a distance.  
                  Was that a peal of thunder?

Audre         Back when I was a girl I believed thunderstorms renewed the world. I stood at the window  
                  waiting for paradise to come. This was the paradise my parents dreamt of in the back rooms  
                  of New York tenements. I shared their dreams. Even up until this day.  
                  When lightning strikes and thunder roars I dream of sitting next to the ocean on that  
                  Caribbean island of my parents and of renewing the world.  
                  Of being healed from old wounds, cancer, and the disrespect  
                  my parents had never prepared me for.

                  (Silence)

Djuna         Maybe the world is being renewed, Audre,



at this very moment.  
And here we are,  
standing around,  
day in, day out, as always.  
Without any notice.  
Of change.  
Of the world.  
Just this thunderstorm, relentless,  
keeping us from our sleep.  
What are we still doing here?  
Ladies.  
You are waiting for paradise, Audre.  
Where is it?  
I'd like to look for it with you.  
You hear voices, Virginia.  
What do they say?

Virginia      I cannot sleep. I cannot eat.  
I cannot go back.  
Oh it's beginning, it's coming – the horror – physically like  
a painful wave swelling about the heart – tossing me up.  
The wave rises, the wave crashes. I wish I were dead!

Djuna          Audre, say something.

Audre          Listen to the rain, Virginia.

Virginia       Wave crashes.

Djuna          Pull yourself together. Please.

Virginia       Now take a pull of yourself.  
No more of this.  
I say it doesn't matter.  
Nothing matters.  
The light is whitening.

Audre          Virginia.

Virginia       Tonight is the last night.  
Everything has gone numb  
No life on the streets.  
The unreality of the violence absorbs it all.  
Everything significant to my life has lost its meaning.  
It will all cease to exist: no readers, no response to my books,  
no thought, no culture.

Audre          Virginia, go to sleep.

Djuna            If everything is to remain the same, and you only intend to keep reciting from your texts, then could you please go about it more quietly?

Virginia        Now we are in the war.  
The feeling of pressure, danger horror.  
It relieves me to speak.

Djuna            Your relief is my pain.

Virginia        It is as if we were all on a small island.

Djuna            There is no war, and this not an island.

Virginia        The Germans are invading.  
Can you hear the jet planes. Duck!  
They will say that people like us –  
such people never existed.  
We never existed.

Djuna            Pull up the walls, saw down the wind, scoop up the sea!  
Lock up the stars and sky, but don't say anything like that.

Audre           Go to sleep now, Djuna.

Virginia        Audre's right. It's late now.

Djuna            What do you mean  
We never existed.

Audre           Calm down.

Djuna            What does she mean?

Audre            Djuna, please.

Virginia        Good night.

Djuna            Bonne nuit!!

                  (Silence)

Djuna            We existed.  
We still exist.  
Paris is no longer Paris – and never will be again.  
But we still exist.  
Thelma. You and me.  
We'll start all over.

Make a fresh start.  
We'll love each other. Forever.  
A thousand nights I've lied awake and imagined  
us meeting once more.  
Thelma Wood and Djuna Barnes.  
Throughout all my nights I search for you.

**Paris. Djuna Barnes und Thelma Wood.**

Djuna            We will renew the world.  
Build a palace of roses.  
Only the two of us remain. In this world.

Thelma           Queen, what of the night?  
Still cloaked in the same darkness.  
I'm hungry.

Djuna            Air. Love. Garden of Eden.  
Fill us up as we have never been before  
throughout all those years.

Thelma           What about something to drink?

Djuna            When dawn breaks we'll see what is left over from the world.  
Clear water. Wine.

Thelma           No one? No one at all?

Djuna            No one else. Just you and me.

Thelma           What'd it be like?

Djuna            Everything is in abundance. Aromatic. Lush. Obsessive.

Thelma           We'd be lost.

Djuna            We'd begin anew.

Thelma           Who'd pay the rent?

Djuna            Nobody would ask for it.  
I want to have all of you, Thelma. All of you. Tonight.

Thelma           I am tired.

Djuna            Well, wake up again.

Thelma           There's nothing to drink here.

Djuna            Let us bathe.  
In champagne and tears of joy.

Thelma           About what?

Everything that has to do with the both of us is painful. Let's not hurt each other again. It's been such a long time.

Djuna           Come with me. We'll begin anew.  
With a palace for the two of us.

Thelma          Who'll pay the rent?

Djuna           Don't be petty.

Thelma          Photographs of back then,  
I kept the ones I like best, my photographs.

Djuna           The night is wet.  
We undress.  
And dance until the break of the new day.  
We are the future.

Thelma          I don't believe it, Djuna.

Djuna           But I do. Me and you. Complètement fou.  
I'll take you into my black "tent,"  
and reproduce with you, that  
which keeps the world in motion.

Thelma          You have had an overdose, my love.

Djuna           Give me more.

Thelma          If we could populate the world from our loins, Djuna,  
what good would men be?

Djuna           For the carrying of Coals, lifting of Beams,  
and things of one kind or another.  
We could use their broad backs to write on.

Thelma          Clip them out of the newspapers, take  
group pictures of them.

Djuna           Read their books, or not.

Thelma          Send them home early.  
Lock them up in their custom-built kitchens.

Djuna           We could coin a new term for "man." Subtract the "n."

Thelma          Drop the "m".

Djuna           Turning them into,  
                  shallow

Thelma           Or valve

Djuna           Or fag  
                  Or we could convert them -

Thelma           - Or recolor them

Djuna           - Or abolish them

Thelma           Love.

Djuna           I will build you a castle.

Thelma           Of wild roses.

**Museum of Famous Women**

**Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde and Djuna Barnes**

Virginia        The deluge.  
                  That is what this rain is like.

Audre         It's stuffy in here. Used up air.

Virginia        You never spoke of Thelma.

Djuna          What's the difference?  
                  Of speaking of her or not?  
                  In the middle of the night.

Virginia        I carry an unwavering certainty within.  
                  Breathtakingly clear.  
                  Like water.  
                  Enticing me to dive in.  
                  Reflecting the heavens.

Djuna          Stop it.  
                  You are the most famous of all of us.  
                  You have money.  
                  You are read.  
                  You have everything.  
                  Why aren't you ever happy?  
                  Why does the world have to revolve around you?  
                  Always around you?

Virginia        You'd be relieved.

Audre         Bullshit.

Virginia        It's not my fault no one reads your books.

Djuna          People are ignorant.

Virginia        They'd rather buy calendars and decorative  
                  postcards of all of you in Paris.

Djuna          What is YOUR way selling yourself?  
                  Using men.

Virginia        Using men.  
                  I – use men.  
                  A lover on every finger.  
                  Everywhere I turn  
                  a lover awaits me.

Djuna I'm not talking about lovers.

Virginia Another night, another date.  
And every one of them gives me breakfast in bed.

Djuna Virginia Woolf was born in 1882 as the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, a British man of letters. Along with her brother she formed the core of the intellectual circle called the "Bloomsbury group" at age 22. In collaboration with her husband, Leonard Woolf, she founded a publishing house. Her novels have placed her among the ranks of James Joyce and Marcel Proust.  
You wouldn't have gotten anywhere without men.  
Is it not so?  
Nowhere.  
Father, brother, husband, Joyce.

Virginia Biographies kill.  
They always end in death.  
It's quite commonplace, in fact.  
Why does this arouse your ire so?

Djuna Because life is missing.  
You must live, first.  
Do you even know what that means?

Virginia You lived as a recluse in an undersized New York flat. For fifty years you lead a miserable existence, dependant on the funds of others, dreaming of gone-bye days in Paris.  
You published your future, but never lived it.  
Is that life, Djuna?

Djuna I revolutionized literature.  
Contributed to a lifestyle.  
Evaded Nazi controls, passed by in the night unnoticed, highly explosive bags in tote.  
Was always on the go.  
In danger.  
Never had money, but drank the finest wine.  
I despise the mundane.  
Had sex with the most remarkable women of Paris.  
I loathe mainstream.  
We changed the world.

Virginia What holds you here, then?

Djuna Shit!

Virginia Day-in, day-out.



Easy to clean, Djuna, easy to replace.

Djuna For one, to keep you from doing anything silly.

Virginia You are afraid of life.  
More than I am.  
Afraid to be alone, to grow old.  
You'd rather end up all bottled up and conserved.  
Young, attractive and representable.  
Look at me, those things aren't important.  
I always looked aged.  
Make-up doesn't suit me.  
Daring attributes either.  
Open hair or pinned up in a bun.  
What difference does it make for Virginia Woolf?  
I never lived past the age I look.  
But you, you...  
Pretend like you lived all those years in a void:  
fifty years of existence.  
Swallowed, undigested, never excreted.  
Forever young.  
In this museum.  
Always a member of a society.  
Always in accompaniment.  
Undoubtedly, you'd look remarkable in age.  
What a pity that you're too vain, too cowardly.  
Youth.  
That's your agenda.  
Djuna Barnes. Too bad. You're terrified. Of life.  
And that's why – and that is the only reason why –  
you are here.  
Admit it.

Djuna What about you?  
Did Leonard arrange for your place here?  
Pick out your clothes?  
Pack your toothbrush?

Virginia He sacrificed himself to care for me.

Djuna What about convention? That's what holds you here.  
Nothing else.

(Pause)

Virginia We're collecting dust beneath our robes.  
I can't bear it any longer.  
Not one day longer.

Djuna Do something about it.  
Stop speaking of water reflecting the heavens  
And the like

Audre If you'd commit suicide,  
They'd say:  
Virginia Woolf was a lunatic  
or sick.  
They'd say,  
poor thing.  
She suffered so much.  
Horrible.

Virginia That is none of your business.

Djuna It's no use, Audre.

Virginia Yet another reason to put an end to it all.

Djuna Strike out at someone. But not at yourself.

Audre They'd say,  
terrible how her brother took advantage of her,  
that pig,  
and then she was frigid.  
No wonder.  
How unfortunate. No sex with Leonard.  
Only her mind, and a pen, and a room of her own.

Virginia Stop it.

Audre Those would be their words,  
They'd say:  
How melancholic you look in the pictures.  
Who wouldn't be  
without any sex,  
and with that childhood,  
and what a genius you were,  
wrote so many books.

Virginia Stop right now.

Djuna Stop it, Audre.

Audre That's what they like.  
The shit people go through,  
And - despite which -

they still remained or grew to become  
a genius.  
Alas, she's dead.  
Too bad.  
Plus you're beautiful. Stunningly beautiful.

Virginia Are you finished? Are you done finished?

Audre No.

Virginia Would you like to speak your mind about my clothing?

Audre No.

Virginia Or Djuna,  
Please, go on.

Djuna Actually, it's a mystery to me indeed how you manage to wear that.

Virginia Did you read my diary?

Audre No.

Virginia How do you know about my relations with my brother?

Audre Father or uncle or brother. Relatives.  
Lucky guess. It's no great feat considering the rate of incidents.

Virginia You think you know everything, don't you? Everything.  
You always know better. Have it all thought out.

Audre I'm furious. I'm furious.  
At you!

Virginia Why, at me?

Audre Because you are stubborn and way too thin. Because you wear  
British colonial-style stuff and refuse to keep on living. Because you are as white as a sheet  
and won't leave me in peace. Because you write racist books. Because you wake up in the  
middle of the night. And take my advice from me in your dreams. And  
because you keep bringing all your shit into this place.

Virginia Could you stop – speaking – just for one moment?  
Take a break for once.

Audre No. I will not stop – speaking. I will never stop speaking,  
if there were ever anything –

Virginia        Take it in, nothing but the silence. Just for once. Stop knowing what's next. Stop speaking above silence.

Djuna            Ladies, it is the middle of the night.  
                    Bethink yourselves.  
                    Some women are Sea-Cattle, and some are Land-Hogs,  
                    and yet others are Worms; but some are Sisters of Heaven,  
                    and these we must follow and not be side-tracked.  
                    Is that supposed to be a good-night prayer?

Audre            I am not speaking above silence. But against it. That is the difference.  
                    I learned that the hard way. My mother couldn't tell the difference often. Between the silence that kills us and the silence that we need to keep in touch with our pain and to give voice to our innermost desires. I need silence. Just as much as you do. But I am afraid of the silence, too. There are so many silences to be broken.

Djuna            Tomorrow. Why not go about it tomorrow?

Audre            When my mother figured out that I loved girls, loved women, she was silent. She couldn't think of any questions or answers. She didn't know what to say, but she kept on talking, so it wouldn't grow silent enough for us to hear the lesbianness. The doors it opened, the flames of yearning it fanned, directly into her daughter's heart. She talked and talked. I had long since left the room, and so had she. Nobody was in the room except for the unspeakable. In the darkest corners of her life I had searched for traces of her pain, for the lenses of her glasses she saw the world through. A white world. A heterosexual world. A white, heterosexual man's world. Never call attention to yourself. Keep your head up. Be happy, at all costs. We are even more normal than the norm. Happy. Proud. We have families. A husband who loves us. Part of the American dream. Belongs to us. We aren't angry, we don't yearn for anything, we feel no pain, we have no pain, don't look, they don't mean us, all that misogyny, all that hate, it's open season on black children in the predawn city of New York.

**Gunfire. Silence.**

**New York. Audre Lorde and her children.**

Daughter      Mamma, other people say we shouldn't exist.

Audre          Of course we exist.

Daughter      'Cause we're not a real family.

Audre          Who says so?

Daughter      Everybody who has a real family.

Audre          We, ourselves, can say what we are, and call us a family, a rainbow, a group of castles, or a kindergarten if we want.

Son            Are we going to change the world?

Audre          We'll give it a good try.

Daughter      Tell us a story, Mamma, please.

Audre          Once upon a time there were two queen children: Butch and Femme. They were both madly in love with the princess next door named Cross Dress. Alas, Cross had a mother dyke who lived freestyle and didn't believe in fixed roles, and forbid Cross to play with Butch and Femme. Their love for one another kept them playing on. They lived happily ever after. And they're still playing dress up together to this day.

Daughter      Tell it again, Mamma!

Audre          No.

Son            Pleeease, Ma'.

Audre          Tomorrow.

(Pause)

Daughter      Mamma, Audre.

Audre          Yes?

Daughter      Where's Poppa?

Audre          At his house.

Daughter      Who's Poppa?

Audre         You know him.  
Poppa is the man I conceived the two of you with.

Daughter      Why did it have be with a poppa?

Audre         'Cause that's how it works, you need a poppa to conceive children.

Son            How come?

Audre         Look here, you are a boy. Boys and men have semen.  
And you are a girl. Girls and women have egg cells.  
When egg cells and semen come together –

Daughter      We know all that. Why doesn't Poppa live with us?

Audre         Because I don't love Poppa.

Both          Oh.

Audre         I mean, because I don't love any poppas at all.

Both          Oh. oh.

Son            Does Poppa love you?

Audre         You have to ask him.

Daughter      Who do you love?

Audre         Mamas.

Both          Mamas?

Audre         No, I mean, I mean women.

Daughter      All of them?

Son            Wow.

Audre         No. Some. A few. One.

Son            How many, exactly?

Audre         At the moment, two very much.

Daughter      Two mamas?

Audre            They are not mammas.

Daughter        But you said that you love mammas.

Audre            I didn't mean it like that.

                    (Pause.)

Son               Are you a poppa?

Audre            How do you figure?

Son               Because you love mammas.

Audre            I said that they are not mammas.

Daughter        What about you?

Audre            I am your mamma. But that's not all.

Daughter        Does that mean you have other children?

Audre            No. But I'm not just a mamma.

Son               You're Poppa too.

Audre            Would you like to have a mamma and poppa?

Son               Yeah.

Daughter        Me too.

Audre            Then I'm your Mamma and Poppa.

Daughter        But what does that make Poppa?

Audre            A man that I conceived you with.

Daughter        What did you need him for if you are both mamma and poppa?

Audre            Back then, I wasn't that far along yet.

                    (Pause)

Daughter        Why are you a lesbian?

Audre            'Cause that's the way I choose to live my life. 'Cause that

is the only way for me to be happy.

Son But sometimes you're unhappy.

Audre All people are unhappy some of the time.

Daughter I wanna be a lesbian too.

Son Me too. And I wanna have two kids.

Daughter Me too.

Audre That could be difficult.

both But you have two kids, too.

Audre That's different. Besides that, you can't grow up to be a lesbian.

Son How come?

Audre Because you're a boy

Son You also grew up to be Poppa.

Audre I decided to call myself that.

Son Me too.

Audre Ok. I am Poppa and you're a lesbian.

Daughter What about me? What's with me?

Audre You can be whatever you want.

Daughter Mother dyke.

Audre That's fine too.

Daughter And I wanna have two kids with another mother dyke.

Son Poppa?

Audre Um, yes?

Son Where's Mamma?

Audre You know what, why don't you go and play?



Daughter      What are you gonna do?

Audre         Sort out my thoughts.

Daughter      Me too.

Son             Me too.

## Museum of Famous Women

### Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, Djuna Barnes

- Virginia      The weather's calmed down.  
I still hear the wind.  
Do you hear it?
- Audre        In the distance.  
(Pause)
- Djuna        How did you manage that – with your children?
- Audre        I was pregnant with them. Gave birth. Brought them up.  
How else?
- Djuna        How did you make them?  
Semen in a turkey baster, roll over on your back, feet up in the air,  
put the semen in, and shake it all about, do a handstand, etc.?
- Virginia     Are you jealous, Ms. Barnes?
- Djuna        No!
- Audre        Yep.
- Djuna        Did you ever try to love the father of your children?  
Did your weight fluctuate? Did you hope for a girl, but then say, 'it doesn't matter'? Keep an  
eye on the clock after having gone to the movies? Buy a child safety seat and make friends  
with other mothers at the playground?  
Start thinking in multiples of three? Never another night to yourself?  
Stopped getting compliments from other women –
- Audre        Does that bother you?
- Djuna        Did you dream of a better future? Wanted to change the world?
- Audre        Through my children. Yes. Of course.  
I don't stand around here talking about being forever young and  
death at the end of biographies.  
Like you. But about real life. Commonplace things.
- Djuna        As a girl I wouldn't have been able to tell my friends  
that my mother loved women. I would've lied. Made up a daddy.  
Spoke of Sunday outings together. And about how I would get married someday too. Find  
my Prince Charming. Just like mommy. Commonplace things.
- Audre        So what?!

Djuna Did you love your husband?

Audre I liked him. But didn't love him.

Virginia Satisfied, Djuna? Liked him, didn't love him. No heart attack.  
A man who is liked is meaningless. Don't sweat it.

Djuna You... you... you elephant.

Virginia You dominant stag.

Audre Lash out at me, if it makes you feel better, Djuna. But be more direct  
about it. Or do you mean to accuse me of betrayal: oh, she sleeps with men.

Djuna You can do whatever you please.

Audre Yes, that I can. Whenever I can. And I won't let your hatefulness won't stand in  
my way. Packaged up in questions. Damn language!  
What do you want from me?

Djuna I want to know who you are.

Audre I am a black lesbian mother.  
My children are from a white man.  
I am a poet in a male-dominated circuit.  
I write in a language that is not my own.  
I teach at a university, at a Western educational institution.  
I relate to you, although we do not share the same history.  
I live in a country that is not my own.  
I fought, but still died of cancer in 1992.  
I thought that your words can't hurt me, Djuna.  
'Cause I can see right through them.

Djuna You know how much you mean to me.

Audre That is why your attacks pain me. Damn it!  
I want to go to sleep. It is excruciatingly late.  
(Silence)

Virginia I can't possibly sleep.

Djuna Me neither.

Audre Me neither.  
The rain stopped. Didn't it? It's so silent.  
I am a Black lesbian feminist warrior poet mother and  
I will always make trouble.

Djuna            Okay, so why – of all places – did you end up here?  
(Pause)

Audre            I'm resting my bones after a long battle.  
I'm trying to get back in touch with myself.  
To feel the curiosity of my body.  
To take pleasure. In myself.  
Slowly, I'm feeling my way forward.  
Still feel tender in the wrong places, where the pain is most concentrated.  
I still need some time.

Djuna            I want to wait with you.  
I want to wait with you.

(Pause)

Virginia        ladies, I am a white poetess of the women's movement and I --

Djuna            Virginia?

Audre            Virginia?

Virginia        And I will create a figure between the sexes  
and demonstrate the absurdity of the Holy Order  
of men's ceaseless mastery over culture.  
I will engender a language the patriarchs are unable to understand.  
Write history in which they play no role.  
Instill cancer in their testicles.  
Burn their colleges to the ground.  
Let the light of the burning scare the nightingales and incarnadine the willows.  
And let the daughters of educated men dance round the fire  
and heap armful upon armful of dead leaves upon the flames.  
And let their mothers lean from the upper windows and cry  
"Let it blaze! Let it blaze!  
For we have done with you fathers and brothers!"  
We will be powerful. Many.  
Many more. Women. Steadily increasing in number.  
Up from the Cellar, down from the Bed of Matrimony.  
From Pantry and Bride's-sleep, in Mid-conception and in old Age,  
from Queen's thrones and Clerks' stools. Some in Nightgowns  
and some in Fashion, some hot with Home work and  
some cool with Decisions.  
We will take back the night and power and pleasure.  
We will live forever, break the silence and shape the  
world into a fine figure of a woman.  
And the three of us among all those beautiful butches, femmes,  
drag kings, dykes, ladies, queens of desire...

Audre Do it, Virginia.

Djuna We'll notify Vita.  
She'll come and get you.  
With a thousand roses.

Audre Do it, Virginia.

Djuna Please.

Virginia What?

Audre Get out of here. Go on.

Virginia What? Where should I go?

Audre The journey is the reward, is it not?

Virginia What about Leonard?

Djuna Greatly though I respect the male mind. I cannot see that they have a glowworm's worth of charm about them – The scenery of the world takes no lustre from their presence. They add of course immensely to its dignity and safety: but when it comes to a little excitement –! Youu wrote that yourself, Virginia Woolf, so don't fret over Leonard.

Audre You spoke of women.

Djuna And you finally said "we." Don't take it back.

Audre Or would you like to stay here and collect dust?  
If you don't give it a try  
I'll start talking again. And won't ever stop.

Virginia Oh my god.

Djuna Try it at least.  
You spoke of this being the last night.  
When, if not now.

Audre Now or never, Virginia.

Virginia What about you two?

Djuna We'll come later on.

Audre When we're ready.

Djuna        For sure.

Audre        Do it.

**England. Virginia and Leonard Woolf.**

Virginia Leonard? Leonard!

Leonard Yes, my dear.

Virginia I have something to tell you. I love Vita.

Leonard Well, for sure, Love. She's wonderful.  
Except that she always wears those ghastly riding breeches.  
But I'm sure that's not what you wanted to tell me.

Virginia No.

(Pause)

I love Vita, different from the way I love you.

Leonard Of course you do.

Virginia I intend, no, I offend, I bend, no, again –  
I inspire, no, I perspire, I'm on fire –  
I'm burning, no yearning, the tables are turning –

Leonard I beg your pardon?

Virginia I'm mad about Vita.  
I want to have her.  
I mean her kisses and so on. Yes.  
I finally outed it – I mean it's finally out.

Leonard What's out?

Virginia I haven't just yet.  
The sofa's too small

Leonard Why are you worried about the sofa?

Virginia I'm not really worried about the sofa.

(Pause)

This is my coming out.

Leonard Whom are you going out with?

Virginia I'm not going out.

Leonard Well then, what's all the fuss about?

Virginia I'm not making a fuss.

Leonard Neither am I.

Virginia Then everything's just fine.

Leonard Yes, it is.

(Pause)

Leonard Why don't you invite Vita to our place?

Virginia Yes, I could.

Leonard We can get a bigger sofa.  
If she only knew how much you loved her.  
You must tell her.

Virginia I wanted to tell you first.

Leonard My love.

Virginia I will tell her. Soon.

(Silence)

Leonard Something's troubling you.

Virginia Damn it, you just don't gather it.

Leonard What should I rather?

Virginia Keep cool, Leo.

Leonard Okay. Okay.

Virginia I was just about to —

Leonard To what? What are you speaking of? What happened? Virgie?

Virginia I want to go to bed with Vita.

Leonard Oh.

Virginia I want to sleep with her.



Leonard No.

Virginia Shag her.

Leonard Oh my.

Virginia Fuck her.

Leonard Why?

Virginia I will do it. I will prove it.

Leonard You mustn't get aroused, Virginia. You'll get a headache.  
Take a deep breath. We'll get through this together. The voices  
will stop – tormenting you. Trust in me. I will always be here for you, no matter what.  
What is it you need, my love. I'd do anything for you.

**Museum of Famous Women**

**Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde and Djuna Barnes**

Virginia        What happened? Where am I?

Audre         You went unconscious.

Virginia       Where's Leonard?

Audre         He's not here.

Virginia       My head. My head is about to explode.

Audre         Take a deep breath. We'll get through this together. Take it slow.  
Relax.

Virginia       You almost sound like Leonard.

Audre         But I'm better looking.  
And have more to offer.

Virginia       Definitely.

Audre         Shhh. Don't talk. Let me.

Virginia       What happened?

Audre         You just came out. It's all good. Have a seat on the sofa.

Vita            (from beneath the sofa)  
The very condition of the married woman seems to me  
altogether grievous.

Virginia       Vita?

Audre         Just relax, stay put.

Virginia       But Vita's here.

Audre         Djuna and I stick to our promises. We informed Vita.  
She came to pick you up.

Vita            The very condition of the married woman seems to me  
altogether grievous. In Youth she is comely, straight of Limb, fair of Eye,  
sweet back and front. Yet it is not but directly after Marriage that she sags,  
stretches, becomes distorted. Her bones dry, her flesh melts, her Tongue is bitter.  
Her mind is corrupt with the Cash of pick-thank existence.

Virginia      Are you talking about me? Vita, you... you... you... Creature.

Vita            What do you recommend to these women?

Audre         To fall in love with their teachers in elementary school.

Virginia       First of all, to sleep with themselves. So that their bones don't run dry and the tongue grows eager for the taste of a nipple.

Vita            Much better.

Virginia       Get out from under the sofa and get right down to it.

Audre         Well, I'd better leave you two alone now.

Vita            This is for you, Virginia, my Potto.

Virginia       If you dare to bring another present, you'll get a tea cosy worked with parrots and tulips. What would you do then?

Vita            Virginia, you've never danced with me.

Virginia       You've never gone to bed with me, dearest Vita.

Vita            One thing after the other.

Virginia       I hate orders.

Vita            Lock the door.

Virginia       So Leonard can't burst in.

Vita            Right.

Virginia       He lives here.

Vita            Only once.

Virginia       Okay. Eyes shut and go!

Vita            You spoke with him.

Virginia       He'd like to have you over to our house sometime soon.

Vita            I'm flattered.

Virginia       Vita, give him some time.

Vita Sure. Outdoors.

Virginia And then?

Vita Then it's quite clear.

Virginia What do you want to do?

Vita What do you think?

Virginia Talk literature.

Vita That's right. At long last – without interruption!  
Two women lying on top of one another,  
burning with desire under the covers – what?  
That's literature, Virginia.

Virginia A tinge like a blush which one tried to check –

Vita And then?

Virginia – and as it spread –

Vita Yes?

Virginia one yielded to its expansion, swollen  
with some astonishing –

Vita With you.

Virginia – some pressure of rapture –

Vita Don't stop!

Virginia – which split its thin skin –

Vita Oh!

Virginia – and gushed and poured with an extraordinary  
alleviation over the cracks and sores.

Vita Love.

(Pause)

Vita What was that?

Virginia      Applied literature, baby –  
                  Oh, I hear Leonard coming.  
                  What should we say?

(Thelma enters. Pulls Djuna (Vita) away.)

Djuna          What are you doing?

Virginia       Who are you?

Thelma        Thelma Wood.

Virginia       I thought you were my husband.

Thelma        Right about now, your husband is probably mulling over your dietary  
                  plan or is with someone else. Like my lover is.

Djuna          Stop it.

Virginia       Let go.

Thelma        No.

Virginia       You're drunken.

Thelma        So what.

Virginia       You've confused your woman with mine.

Thelma        Both white. It can happen.

Djuna          Cool down, Thelma.

Thelma        No. Come with me, Djuna. Come home. Please.

Djuna          No.

Thelma        What about our castle?

Djuna          There is no castle.

Thelma        You wanted to build one. For me. For us.

Virginia       You're drunken.

Thelma        I'm scared.

Djuna          Let me go.

Virginia           Get out of my house.

Thelma            But I just got here.

Djuna             Thelma. Calm down.

Thelma            You don't know me like this. Isn't that what you wanted to say?  
To apologize for me? She's not usually like this. So violent.

Virginia           Stop. Stop this instance.

Thelma            Don't you ever get in a fistfight with your old man?

Virginia           Leonard doesn't hit people.

Thelma            Do you?

Virginia           I don't either.

Thelma            You'd rather walk into the water. Rocks in your pockets.  
Bemoaning the loss of the love of your life: Vita.  
But she is not even mentioned in your obituary.  
Just Leonard. Tough luck. And your loving family.  
All in a pretty little row, one after another. Who inherited your money?  
Your room? Could it have been your beloved brother? With his hand in your  
pants? I'd rather be a thug, keep on fighting, and stay alive.  
Alcohol: that's nothin'.

Virginia           She is filled to the gills.

Djuna             Stop it. It's over. Thelma, it's over between us. For good. Over.

**Museum of Famous Women**  
**Audre Lorde and Djuna Barnes.**

Audre Virginia is gone.

Djuna Mais non!

(Picks up a letter.)

Audre, you read it. I can't.  
She said this was the last night.  
That 's what she said.  
She said it a thousand times.  
I didn't want to believe her.  
We have got to go and look for her.

Audre Djuna, let her go.

Djuna Who knows what she's capable of. In her state.  
What if she never comes back?  
Can't find her way back?  
What if she –

Audre She won't go into the river.

Djuna How do you know? You think you know everything, don't you?  
You always know best. All the time.

Audre Read the letter.

Djuna (reading)  
Dear Women,  
I hope to bathe in your company again in the near future.  
Yes, I was – in your accompaniment – wholly and entirely happy.  
Think of me, and you'll always have something to laugh about:  
Virginia out there with her powder falling, hairpins dropping and  
no idea where a woman is to go in this city. You'll say this  
is one of my moonlight, romantic, stags barking, old man feeding  
them from a bucket in the snow ideas.  
And you'll be right.  
Love,  
Virginia.  
p.s. Thank you Djuna, for I have borrowed your hat.  
p.p.s. By the way, I slept with Vita. In my dreams.  
But forgot to count how many times.  
p.p.p.s. Your love is what kept me alive.  
p.p.p.p.s. Finally, now the two of you can flirt in peace.  
Yours,

Virgie, Queen of Desire.

(Pause)

Djuna           Where will she go?

Audre           She'd do fine anywhere.  
At least she's out and about.  
She'll go places.

Djuna           Florid, moustached, parakeet coloured.  
What did she mean by the last post-script, by "finally..."

Audre           She meant that now we can flirt in peace.

Djuna           I don't know what she's talking about, do you?

Audre           Nope.

(...)

Djuna           Nobody'd ever believe it anyway: Audre Lorde –

Audre           – and Djuna Barnes.

(...)

Djuna           Dawn is breaking.  
You are so quiet.  
Dearest,  
would you rather hold me or have some breakfast?  
Say something, Audre, please.

Audre           I thought you didn't like to talk during sex.

Djuna           Talk is sexy. I learned that from you.

Audre           Bon, Djuna.

Tender and sublime  
without a doubt  
it's your time  
of the month

Djuna           You ... you... Creature, you.

Audre           Breasts grow larger, let me take a look –  
let me take you –



beneath my fingers  
your skin: rough and pallid  
droplets of sweat beneath your breasts,  
more than usual.  
Tender and sublime  
without a doubt  
it's your time  
of the month  
Your hand slides down between my thighs,  
And me between yours, like this?  
By now your body,  
diagonally draped over me  
our hands knotted,  
let me come closer  
to you,  
into you.  
But you: would rather me come from behind and from  
underneath or – wait – like this – okay, now you're set,  
but then – no –  
not from that side,  
yet please do slide your hand  
down along my stomach.  
If I only knew how to get there from here.  
Intent, you touch me and suddenly come at me  
headfirst, face gleaming, on your breath the sharp smell of limes  
Tender and sublime  
without a doubt  
it's your time  
of the month  
On my face you wipe yours, colorless make-up,  
from your cheek to mine.  
Not a minute to spare for make-up tips.  
"Darling," you croon, as you ask if I'd rather hold you  
or have some breakfast.  
I feel the heat radiating between my thighs,  
my left hand has fallen asleep,  
I feel you all the way to my feet  
and am surprised  
you'd want breakfast right in the middle of things  
But you're not.  
Tender and sublime  
without a doubt  
it's your time  
of the month

Djuna      You! You are just a – poet!

Audre      How was I?

Djuna            Genius.

Audre            Freshly inspired.

Djuna            It is beautiful, Audre. But the rhyming. Could you  
leave out the rhymes?

Audre            What don't you like about the rhymes?

Djuna            They are sickeningly harmonious. Aside from that it was absolutely beautiful.  
Formidable.  
So secret and private, as Virginia would say.

Audre            Virginia knew it. Even before we did:  
Djuna Barnes and Audre Lorde.

Djuna            You think she'll tell it around town?

Audre            No one would believe her anyway.  
They'd all say she must've been seeing things.

Djuna            She's off and went with my hat. Just like that.  
It's been out of fashion for ages.  
I hope she won't go out and demand for the women's right to vote.  
Or for the fair division of household labor.  
Or for women's right to higher education.  
Or equal pay for equal work.

Audre            Why?

Djuna            Those are all things of the past.

Audre            She made it. She's out.

Djuna            We'll dedicate a monument to her.

Audre            Black. Female. Radical. Lesbian.

Djuna            A Lady of Fashion.

Audre            The 20<sup>th</sup> century Sapphist.

Audre            The Sapphic Queen.

(Enter Ellen Degeneres)

Audre The Sapphic Queen.

Djuna Mon dieu.

Audre Too bad she's so white and so blonde.

Djuna Who are you?

Ellen Hey. I'm Ellen, Ellen Degeneres, the U.S. TV star.  
But hey, I didn't want to cut in. Did I? Did I? I'm terribly sorry.  
Really. Who are you?

Djuna The unknown legend of American literature. Djuna Barnes.

Ellen Hey, Djuna! Nice to meet you. How are you?

Audre I am a Black lesbian feminist warrior poet mother.  
Nice to meet you, Ellen.

Ellen Excuse me, I didn't get your name, really I didn't.

Audre Audre Lorde.

Ellen Hey, Audre! Nice to meet you.

Audre Welcome.

(Pause)

Ellen I... I... I am not really a Sapphic Queen. I mean, I am not a queen,  
I... I'd like to be a Queen, but...  
I'd like to be a lesbian, but I don't know how.  
I mean, I am a lesbian, but I don't know why.  
I mean, I don't know if I'm a lesbian and who else is one.  
I mean, I'm sure I'm a lesbian, but how do I get the woman I want into bed?  
Shoo. Ok. Take it easy, Ellen. Start over again.  
I'm probably the most famous lesbian in the world.  
Millions of TV viewers can't be wrong.  
In my sitcom Ellen, I prepared my coming out for two full years.  
Everybody was waiting for it. The whole nation held its breath.  
And then it happened: I fell in love with Susan.  
I told my parents and I told my friends and I told my boss  
I'm gay -- and then the show was cancelled.

Djuna Shit.

Audre Typical.

Ellen            So – before she and I could even get started, we were cancelled.  
What happened to YOU when you proved to the world that you're lesbian?

Djuna            We hadn't planned to "prove it to the world." It just happened.  
It's not really important who one loves and what name it carries.

Ellen            I see.

Audre            I do think it's important who one loves and what name it carries, and  
of course we had planned to prove that we're lesbians.

Djuna            What did you just say?

Audre            Why else would we go through all that performing?

Djuna            Well, I didn't plan anything. Those were my true feelings.

Audre            Mine too, Djuna.

Djuna            I don't believe you, if it was all planned out.

Audre            Not everything.

Djuna            You... you... you, to the bone, true-blue lesbian.

(Pause)

Djuna            Did you bring your lover with you?

Ellen            Oh, no. I didn't. I mean I haven't. I mean I couldn't. How should I put it?  
Imagine: after two long years, finally there's a woman, THE woman, Susan.  
But then my sitcom was cancelled. Over. Finito. That's why – sexually speaking – I don't actually have  
much experience. I don't have any experience.  
Well, actually, none at all.

Audre            Just do it.

Djuna            Imagine you're sitting on the sofa.

Ellen            What if somebody walks in?

Djuna            Then we say that we're just tending to each other 's personal hygiene.

(...)

Audre            Don't forget, Ellen.  
Be proud.

Be loud.

Be out.

Djuna            No rhyming please. It's time to go.

Audre            Yes.

Djuna            Say hi to New York for me.

Audre            And you to Paris for me. Good luck, Djuna, bye-bye.

Djuna            Au revoir, Audre, au revoir.

(Both exit in different directions,  
Ellen remains alone on stage.  
Image of a lesbian.)

THE END

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