

ROOM TEMPERATURE

A short dramedy by
Ellen Margolis

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LEX, early teens, quiet and serious.

DANIKA, early teens, tough, angry.

ISABEL, Lex's sister, a year or two older than Lex and Danika.

SETTING

A small town in the U.S., the kind of place where everyone sounds a little "country," whether in Montana or California farm country or the south. Danika was born and raised here. Lex and Isabel have not lived here long. Their speech suggests a more educated background than Danika's, and their clothing might also set them apart.

NOTE

Slashes (/) indicate interruptions. When one character's line contains a slash, the next speaker should start their next line at that point.

(In the dark, we hear a bell signaling the end of the school day and the noise of kids leaving. Lights up on a Home Economics classroom, which may be suggested by a single counter. A working clock shows that the time is 3:10. Enter LEX, carrying a tote bag. He unpacks its contents and arranges them on the counter, moving calmly and with purpose. From the tote bag he takes a 5-pound bag of flour, a 1-pound bag of sugar, a container of salt, a dozen eggs, a pound of butter, and a couple of small zip-lock bags containing spices.)

(Lastly, he removes a neatly folded apron from the bottom of the bag, puts it on, folds the tote bag and stashes it out of the way.)

(Waits.)

(Checks the clock.)

(From a lower shelf or elsewhere in the room, he gathers a few utensils and two mixing bowls.)

(Checks the clock.)

(Waits.)

(He notices something about the butter.)

LEX: Oh no! Darn it.

(DANIKA appears in the doorway.)

DANIKA: *(Mocking:)* "Oh, darn it! Oh, darn it!"

LEX: *(Bracing himself:)* Hi, Danika.

DANIKA: What's the matter? Did you break a nail? Ooh, did your apron get dirty?

(Lex ignores her. Danika responds by moving very close to him and staring in his face.)

LEX: I have permission to be here. We have a class starting in a few minutes.

DANIKA: Apron class? (*Frantically swiping at her clothes:*) "Ooh, my apron is just filthy!"

(Lex sighs.)

You're being kind of rude there, Alex./I asked you a question.

LEX: Lex.

DANIKA: A-lex. Is it *apron* class?

LEX: Food science.

DANIKA: Ooh! Ooh! Can I take food science class? Pretty please?

LEX: You don't want to take it.

DANIKA: (*Like a series of fast punches:*) But could I? Could I? Could I? Could I?

LEX: You know you can't.

DANIKA: Oh, that's right...it's the GIFTED cooking class. For pretty little gifted babies in their frilly aprons. Right? Right? Right?

LEX: (*Deep breath.*) Right.

DANIKA: Just you and the gals. (*Gasp.*) Do they even know you're a guy?

LEX: Don't you have anything better to do?

DANIKA: Nuh-uh. I'm not gifted.

(As Danika grabs a whisk off the table, ISABEL appears in the doorway, watches silently.)

"Oh, look! I use my whisk to whip up gifty egg whites and make gifty pudding for my gifty little babies."

LEX: Wait – you like to cook?

DANIKA: What? NO.

LEX: You sure? Or do you watch cooking shows maybe?

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(Danika shrugs.)

I like the science of it. Like when you make cookies, the reason you mix the butter and sugar together first is/that the sugar –

DANIKA: Don't care. *(Tosses the whisk back on the counter.)*
What's wrong with your mom?

LEX: What do you mean?

DANIKA: Why does she wear black all the time?

LEX: I don't know. She just does.

DANIKA: Why does she wear those big sunglasses?

LEX: She likes them. People wear black where we're from./The city.

DANIKA: Well, she sticks out like crazy. *(Right up in his face:)*
Is she crazy?

LEX: No.

ISABEL: *(Crossing to them:)* Hey! Idiot.

DANIKA: Someone's calling you.

ISABEL: YOU, idiot. Back off.

DANIKA: Who's this, your fairy godmother?

ISABEL: His fairy godmother's in rehab. I'm his sister. And that's my mom you're talking about.

DANIKA: Sorry.

ISABEL: Yeah. You're in the wrong room. This is for smart kids. Or at least normal kids.

DANIKA: How rude!

ISABEL: *(Coming at Danika aggressively:)* What does "euphonious" mean? Who was president before Obama [or current president]? What's nine times twelve? What's a catheter? What year did Helen Keller die?

DANIKA: God, shut up. Who cares about that stuff?

ISABEL: Smart people.

LEX: Not necessarily. You can be smart in a lot of different—

(Isabel cuts him off with an "are you kidding me?" look.)

DANIKA: Shut up. Loser.

(Isabel grabs the whisk, threatens Danika with the handle.)

ISABEL: You want to know how this feels shoved up your freakin' nose?

DANIKA: OK—I'm going. You're both weird, and by the way your mom looks crazy. You should tell her to dress normal.

(Danika exits.)

ISABEL: Why do you let her say that stuff to you? *(Lex glares.)* Are you serious? I got rid of that little pig for you, and you don't even thank me?

LEX: Congratulations. You treated her like she was treating me. And you didn't fix anything. We *are* weird here./Can you imagine Mom in one of those flag t-shirts?

ISABEL: That doesn't mean people get to—that's not the point! You don't even fight back!

LEX: Just let me be, Izzy. Mr. Mitchell will be here any minute, and the other kids. *(Beat.)* You probably made it worse.

ISABEL: Whatever.

LEX: Why are you even here?

ISABEL: That guy Connor?

LEX: Yeah?

ISABEL: Well, he and some friends of his are playing at the square tonight. I said I'd help them move their instruments. Can you leave by four thirty?

LEX: What? No! Class goes till five.

ISABEL: Yeah, but it's not a real class./You don't have to be here.

LEX: It's real for me. I like it./I want to—

ISABEL: No, I know you like it. That's cool. But I mean it's not a *class* class.

LEX: I'm making something special for Mom. It's the last meeting and Mr. Mitchell said we can bring in our own recipe, whatever we want to make.

(Isabel looks at the ingredients on the counter.)

ISABEL: What's special about this?

LEX: You remember the cookies she liked at that Aurora Bakery in Evanston?

ISABEL: By the laundromat? Yeah, sure. *(A happy memory.)* We always went and got a cookie as soon as we finished putting everything in the washers. But that place has been closed for—

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