

„All For You, Harold”

A Stageplay in Two Acts

By Shirl Solomon

Shirl Solomon

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All For You, Harold

Set: One

Cast

Time: The Present

Costumes: Contemporary

HAROLD ROSTOV

90 year-old dapper man, with charm and a jaunty swagger that prevails over unsteady limbs.

ETHEL ROSTOV

85 year-old frail, dying woman with a light-hearted, indomitable spirit.

TERI ROSTOV

50 year-old daughter of Harold and Ethel, youthful and attractive despite a strung-out bearing.

DR. SIDNEY MEISTER

60 year-old estranged husband of Teri, unremarkable looking.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Time: The Present, An April Evening

Place: A Modest Florida Condo

The small 2nd floor condo is snug with rich, old-world furniture, a breakfront of antiques and wall-to-wall paintings, among them is one of Ethel Rostov, young and full-bosomed.

Down stage, right, is the condo entrance into the dining/living room area which leads to the sun porch. Above the living room is the bedroom and adjoining bath. (offstage) At right apron of stage is a small kitchen.

Curtain opens with Ethel in bed in the bedroom. Harold is in the living room in an easy chair talking into a tape recorder. On an endtable by him is a bottle of Cognac and a half-emptied glass.

HAROLD

I speak to you in the year nineteen hundred, ninety-two from Florida, where my wife and I retired and will be finishing our days on this planet. I was born in 1901 in a cosmopolitan city in the Ukraine. I recall an early memory in 1905, near the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Our elderly nurse, Katya, was taking me and my brother, Morris, to our father's tobacco shop when rifle shots broke out in the street. We got safely home, but the incident made us fearful of being alone, so my mother hired Lisa, a 16 year-old peasant girl, to be our companion. I was 6 the day Lisa and I were alone resting. By accident, my hand slipped under her skirt. I felt something warm and fuzzy. It was the first time I realized a girl is different from a boy, and I liked it. She liked it, too. We rested a lot in those days. Later, when I went to school I was given the part of the wolf in a school play. I was an authentic wolf—and I still am. Summers, the family vacationed at our villa in the Crimea on the Black Sea. My father could not leave his business, and I recall my sad goodbye to him—the droshky ride to the railroad station, the aroma of fresh bread and vegetables being loaded onto carts—blending in with the smell of horse droppings—ughhhhhh an unforgettable smell.

(He takes a sip of Cognac.)

The front door opens and Teri enters with a bag of groceries. She lays the bag on the kitchen counter and plugs in the electric coffee pot.)

HAROLD

(Into Microphone)

Russia was a hard life for a poor Jew, but well-to-do, educated Jews like us were allowed to live in large cities and the establishment used our talents to build the industry. At nine, I was accepted into the high school of engineering where I soon decided I'd be an artist.

(Harold lays down the microphone, hurries to his daughter as she starts into the bedroom and pulls her away.)

HAROLD

Don't go in. Ethel's sleeping.

TERI

So, she'll wake up. She sleeps enough.

HAROLD

What's the matter with you? Don't you have any sense?

(Teri returns to the kitchen and pours herself a cup of coffee.)

(Glancing at his watch)

You've been gone two hours and five minutes.

TERI

Did you want to go out?

HAROLD

I was worried you'd have trouble with my car since you don't drive in New York. You take expensive taxis.

TERI

It's cheaper than getting mugged in the subway. Shall I start supper?

HAROLD

The supper is done. The filet of sole is in the oven and I'll soon put the peas on the stove. If it's not too much trouble, you could set the table.

1 – 1 – 3

TERI

I'll make a salad.

HAROLD

We don't have raw vegetables.

TERI

(Taking a head of lettuce from the bag)
I shopped while I was out.

HAROLD

Your mother can't digest it, but If you want salad, make salad. I'm not going to argue with you.

TERI

(Washing the vegetables)
Anyone call?

HAROLD

Plenty of people called. They were curious to know if Ethel's died yet. And the Rabbi wanted to notify us that he's going on vacation and wouldn't be here in case we should need him. As a last resort, he gave me the name of someone, not as good as he, to perform the service.

TERI

Anyone call for me?

HAROLD

You? Let me think...Yes. Mitchell.

TERI

(Playing down her interest)
Oh? What did he say?

HAROLD

I don't ask Mitchell questions. But if you wouldn't mind, next time I'll ask this handsome, wonderful man who is fifteen years your junior, how for eight years the two of you have managed to live off the alimony from your second husband.

TERI

Off my case, Harold. Mitchell pays his share. Residuals are still coming in from his commercials, and his agent is working a deal to get him on "One Life To Live."

HAROLD

If he had two lives to live, he wouldn't get on. At thirty-five, his chances are dwindling. By the way, I haven't seen that TV Fruit of the Loom commercial in a while.

1 - 1 - 4

TERI

It's off the air. But something else will come along.

HAROLD

You can afford to wait? At his age I was art director for RKO Studios, supporting your

mother, you and your brother nicely. Which reminds me. A student of mine wants to buy my posters of Dolores Del Rio and Rita Hayworth. I don't know if I should break up the portfolio. It could bring you and your brother a lot of money when I'm dead. Do you want to see the posters I'm referring to?

TERI

I've seen them, Harold

(She wipes her hands and dials the portable phone in the living room while Harold goes to the closet and pulls out a large portfolio.)

HAROLD

If you're calling your New York apartment, you won't find Mitchell. He's in Los Angeles. The phone number is on the message pad.

TERI

Los Angeles— California?

HAROLD

That's where they told us it was when I was in Kharkov grade school learning about decadent capitalistic societies.

(Teri hangs up, rips off the top sheet from the message pad, pulls a cigarette from her jeans' pocket and is about to light it.)

If you want to smoke, go outside.

(Handing her a jar of nuts)

Here, eat these raw nuts you brought along with your ten bottles of vitamins. Maybe they'll replace your desire for nicotine.

(Teri takes the jar and the portable phone into the sun porch, which has been fashioned into a bedroom for her. She dials the number on the message sheet.)

Harold pulls out the movie advertising posters of Dolores Del Rio and Rita Hayworth and places them on display while he listens to the phone conversation.)

1 - 1 - 5

TERI

(Into the phone)

Mitchell!?!— Teri. You didn't tell me you were going to L.A.?... A part in a movie? Really!?!..When will you know?

HAROLD

(Muttering to himself)

When he needs money, she'll hear from him soon enough.

TERI

(She glances at the bedroom)

(Into phone)

Not good - but she's still with us. Her heart is holding up better than the cancer. Mitchell, when this is over, we should consider re-locating to Los Angeles.

HAROLD

(To himself)

He's already located himself in Los Angeles without her.

TERI

(Into phone)

So, it'll be tough. We've been broke before...

HAROLD

(To himself)

And who bailed them out? Ya.

TERI

(Into phone)

My editorial experience with New York publishers should land me a job—maybe as story editor with a movie studio. Then I could help you network.

HAROLD

Three months at the Village Voice proofreading matchmaking ads and she refers to it as editorial experience.

TERI

(Into phone)

We don't have to give up the apartment — until we work things out...you'll do terrific. Just don't panic - and call me after the audition...

(Softly)

I wish I were with you, Mitchell...I love you...Bye.

(She hangs up)

(Teri starts to light the cigarette again, notices her father's frown and puts it back into her jeans' pocket. She gobbles down a handful of nuts from the jar, returns to the living room and looks at the posters.)

1 - 1 - 6

HAROLD

What do you think? Are they magnificent?

TERI

They're something, Harold. A collector of movie memorabilia would probably pay a lot to have your collection.

HAROLD

So what happened to the slides I sent you years ago. I didn't expect Christi's or

Sotherby's would fall over backwards, but in between two husbands and a boyfriend, you could have drummed up an agent for your father.

TERI

I tried, Harold. I'm not good at selling anything. You know that.

(Ethel, in the bedroom, awakens and moans. Harold hurries to her ahead of Teri. Teri stands behind him.)

HAROLD

What is it, darling? Are you in pain?

(Harold props up Ethel's pillow and pulls her up to rest on it. Ethel's head slumps onto her chest. He jostles her back up again. Teri watches, pained by Harold's clumsy attempts.)

ETHEL

Where's my beautiful Teri?

TERI

I'm here, Ethel.

(Ethel reaches out an arm to Teri. Harold intercepts, takes Ethel's arm and kisses her hand. Ethel moans.)

HAROLD

What can I do for you, my darling? Do you need another pill?

(He takes a bottle from the dresser and pours a pill into his hand.)

Would you like me to bring you a little apricot juice to wash it down?

(Ethel struggles to get up while Harold restrains her.)

1 - 1 - 7

ETHEL

Harold, I have to go to the bathroom.

HAROLD

I'll take you.

ETHEL

(Trying to disengage him)

I can go myself.

HAROLD

No. You'll hurt yourself.

(Ethel and Harold struggle. Unable to restrain herself and longer, Teri pulls Harold away.)

TERI

Let her go, Harold!

HAROLD

You don't understand. She could fall and break a bone.

TERI

She won't fall. But if you're worried, I'll go with her. Come on, Ethel.

ETHEL

(Falls back on the bed)

You, two, go. I lost the urge.

(Harold lays a wet cloth on Ethel's forehead and kisses her cheek. With a weak hand, Ethel removes the cloth and slaps it into the basin of water.)

HAROLD

(Testing the water with his fingers)

It's warm. I'll get fresh water.

(With the basin, he starts for the door)

ETHEL

Harold -

HAROLD

(Returning to her, quickly)

Yes, my darling - ?

1 - 1 - 8

ETHEL

If you don't mind, put ice cubes in it.

(Harold redirects himself toward the kitchen)

ETHEL

And maybe you could bring me some apricot juice in a small glass —And while you're there - a slice of cinnamon toast.

HAROLD

Are you sure? We're having supper soon.

ETHEL

I'm sure. And you don't have to rush.

HAROLD

I'm fixing filet of sole almandine and the sweet peas you like.

ETHEL

I know. The smell is making me nauseous. Close the door on your way out.

(As Harold exits into the kitchen, Ethel puts on her glasses, gets out of bed and gropes her way to the bathroom.)

(To Teri)

If Harold returns, tell him I went to a movie.

(The phone rings. Harold picks it up in the kitchen, talking as he prepares toast.)

HAROLD

Hello?...Yes, Ken, I called. The pills aren't working so good anymore. You have something stronger?...When later? She needs it now...I did talk to the doctor. He said an operation could reduce the pain - if she lived through it.

(The toilet flushes and Ethel emerges from the bathroom, weak. Teri helps her back into bed.)

TERI

Are you alright? You weren't very long.

ETHEL

(Taking off her glasses)

There was no reason to linger. Harold finished my crossword puzzle.

1 - 1 - 9

TERI

In the New York Times? He got it right?

ETHEL

I don't know. He did it in Russian.

HAROLD

(Continuing into phone)

Ken, ask the doctor to increase the pain medication...I know it's morphine. You have something better?...Thank you very much...At the moment, she's resting...I'll tell her. Goodbye.

(He hangs up, puts the toast and juice on a tray, then adds a fresh flower to it. In the bedroom, Teri massages Ethel's feet.)

ETHEL

Ahhhhhhh, that's good. Teri, this time you'll stay a few days more - maybe a week?

TERI

I don't like leaving my cat for so long. Harold won't permit Abraham in the condo.

(Harold enters with the tray.)

HAROLD

Again, with the cat? It costs me enough to fly you back and forth to New York, you can keep bonding, it shouldn't forget you. If somebody else is now feeding it, to that cat you're already history.

(He presses the toast to Ethel's reluctant lips. Teri takes it from him and puts the toast into Ethel's hand. Ethel nibbles on it.)

Ethel, sweetheart, Ken, the social worker from Hospice called.

ETHEL

He didn't want to talk to me?

HAROLD

Of course. You're the reason he called. I took a message.

ETHEL

You're now my social secretary who doesn't let me talk to anybody.

HAROLD

I explained that you were resting. He said to tell you he's coming to visit tomorrow.

ETHEL

So, I'll make sure to be here.

1 - 1 - 10

(Ethel reaches for a book on the night table.
Harold restrains her.)

TERI

Harold, let her have the book.

HAROLD

Her eyes are bad. She doesn't have to strain them. If she wants, I'll read to her.

ETHEL

Harold, you take such good care of me, you don't let me live.

HAROLD

Because I love you, Ethel.

ETHEL

I know. You've loved me for sixty years. No one could ask for a more loving husband. Now go finish the marvelous supper that only my Harold can cook.

(Harold, spurred by the idea of attending to his next creative chore, hurries into the kitchen.)

ETHEL

No wife in this world was ever so loved by a husband. Do I deserve it?

TERI

He could have loved you less and his children more.

ETHEL

He loved you, Teri - better than your brother.

TERI

So, imagine how Philip feels.

ETHEL

Some men make better husbands than fathers. For such a husband, a wife pays a price. The more loving he is, the more she has to worry there isn't somebody else he's loving on the side.

(She hesitates)

Forty years ago, Harold had an affair with a model from RKO Studios.

...That doesn't surprise you?

TERI

No.

1 - 1 - 11

ETHEL

I thought it would.

TERI

Why didn't you leave him?

ETHEL

He begged me not to. Where would I go? In those days, you didn't leave children for a job. Besides, I loved Harold. He was good to us. Don't you remember?

TERI

I remember he supported us. Ethel, you could have made it. You were damn good at the piano, good enough to have given recitals and concerts— taken in students.

ETHEL

My career was raising two children and keeping a husband happy, some grabby woman shouldn't snatch him away from me. You were the talented one, Teri. Not many young girls were accepted at Sarah Lawrence College.

TERI

You may as well know, Ethel. The brilliant paper I submitted that got me in was drafted by a free lance writer for Playboy. He owed Harold a favor for a story Harold had illustrated. So, you see, I wasn't so talented.

ETHEL

Louis Gollub only drafted the paper. You edited it.

TERI

You knew? - You arranged it?

ETHEL

(Not too convincing)

Me? Would I do such a thing?

TERI

It doesn't matter. I didn't last a year at Sarah Lawrence.

ETHEL

Because you married Sidney.

TERI

He was my excuse to quit school before I flunked out.

ETHEL

You were beautiful and clever enough to get a doctor and a businessman— not one, but two wealthy husbands. Two chances you threw away. Either man would have provided you a good life.

1 - 1 - 12

TERI

They would have provided.

ETHEL

For most wives, it's a good enough reason to stay married. But my Teri, has to love a man physically, intellectually, spiritually — astrologically. You're were never practical and are still not. I need that worry at this time of my life?

TERI

You don't have to worry. Mitchell and I have plans to—

ETHEL

(Holding up a frail hand)

Don't tell me. You're living with a man 5 years older than your son, who can't earn a living. What was wrong with your two husbands that's not wrong with Mitchell?

TERI

Mitchell is sensitive. He shares himself and his thoughts, and he treats me like a person, not a possession. He's tender, and he knows how to love a woman.

ETHEL

Sex - again. So, your husbands were short in that department. You could have lived

with it. What have you to show for eight years with Mitchell? You have no marriage, no children together. If he should leave, who will take care of you in your old age?

TERI

I'm not there yet. I'll worry later.

ETHEL

Later comes soon enough. One day you'll look in the mirror and see an old lady.

(Touches Teri's face)

And you'll have no husband to recall that you were once beautiful.

(Harold brings food from the kitchen into the dining room and sets plates on the table.)

HAROLD

(Calling from the dining room)

Teri, help your mother into the dining room. I'm putting dinner on the table.

(Teri helps Ethel into a pretty robe and supports her into the dining room. Harold hurries to seat Ethel at the table. Then he trudges between the kitchen and dining room, bringing in one plate at a time.)

1 - 1 - 13

TERI

(Following after Harold)

Wouldn't it be easier to put the plates on a tray.

HAROLD

Not for me.

TERI

It's silly to make so many trips when you don't have to.

HAROLD

This is the way I do things in my house.

TERI

Anybody can see your way doesn't make sense.

ETHEL

She's right, Harold.

HAROLD

I'm 90. You want I should change?

TERI

It's a small thing to change, Harold. You wouldn't have to keep coming and going.

ETHEL

In this world, people are going and coming. Coming and going.

HAROLD

(To Teri)

Don't follow me. Sit down and start eating.

(Teri sits at the table and nibbles on a carrot. Ethel swoons from the smell as Harold cuts up the fish on her plate.)

ETHEL

(Tasting her salad)

Harold, the salad is wonderful.

HAROLD

You like it, my darling? It's made with aged Balsamic vinegar to give it a tangy taste.

ETHEL

Delicious.

(Teri looks at Harold with expectation)

1 - 1 - 14

HAROLD

(To Teri)

What - ?

TERI

Why didn't you tell Ethel that I made the salad?

HAROLD

Oh? It didn't occur to me.

TERI

She thinks you made it.

HAROLD

Okay, I'll tell her. Ethel, the dinner was prepared by me, but your daughter made this wonderful salad - without the Balsamic vinegar. That, I put in.

TERI

Can't you be gracious enough to give me more than back-handed compliment. Would it hurt to acknowledge my contribution to the dinner?

HAROLD

I'm sorry. What do you want me to do now?

TERI

Nothing! It's too late.

HAROLD

So, keep quiet and eat.

TERI

(Pushing her plate away)

I'm not hungry for this wonderful, delicious supper you made all by yourself.

(Ethel, anticipating the worst, gets panicky.)

HAROLD

You're behaving like a child instead of a middle-aged twice-divorced woman.

(Teri snatches the salad plate from the table and dumps the contents into the garbage. Ethel is having trouble breathing.)

HAROLD

Are you crazy? Stop already. You're upsetting your mother.

TERI

I'm upsetting her!? You bastard, you started this!

1 - 1 - 15

HAROLD

Don't talk to me like that in my house!

TERI

(Rising in a huff)

Then, I'll leave! And you can have Ethel all to yourself, the way you want it!

ETHEL

(Weakly)

No, don't go - Harold, don't fight with her - I'm begging you -

(Teri and Harold are too worked up against each other to pay attention to Ethel.)

HAROLD

(To Teri)

If you decide to leave, I'm not holding you. You came down to help, instead you stick a knife in my back. You sneak cigarettes and smell up the place, overload my garbage with roots from your health foods, sleep away the day and complain about not having your cat.

TERI

My cat's given me more attention than you have since the day I was born!

HAROLD

What do you want from me? I had to make a living. It was your mother's job to take care of you and your brother. It was no different with my father. He went to work and

my mother took care of us.

TERI

Because your father didn't spend time with you and Uncle Morris, it was okay for you not to spend time with your kids. That's some lesson you learned from him.

HAROLD

I understood that work and supporting the family was my father's first priority.

TERI

Your father's priority wasn't his family. It was his ego. In Russia, he held himself above the ghetto Jews - enjoyed the privileges and connections of a prosperous businessman. When he came to America and was forced to work for someone else, he blew his brains out. His wife and kids had to fend for themselves.

HAROLD

You don't understand. He ran from the war in Russia, leaving a small fortune there, arrived in New York and worked in a bakery seven days a week for peanuts. He couldn't climb out of the hole—a humiliation for a man like my father. Above all, a man must maintain dignity.

1 - 1 - 16

TERI

Dignity, nothing! He was an arrogant son-of-a-bitch like you, who had to be numero uno in his family or else dead!

HAROLD

So, give me credit I didn't blow my brains out!

(Looking to the ceiling)

Dear God, if I wasn't an atheist, I'd pray to you. Maybe you'd tell me what to do with this child whom I happen to love.

TERI

(Teri looks at Harold, suddenly transformed)

You love me, Harold?

HAROLD

Of course. I've always loved you.

(Teri, sobbing, throws her arms around Harold.)

TERI

I love you, too. I'm sorry for the things I've said. Harold - I think we've broken down a barrier between us.

(Ethel staggers toward the bedroom.)

ETHEL

I've got to lie down. All this love is killing me quicker.

CURTAIN

