

Caught

By Sharon E. Cooper

Characters:

Deborah, F., 42

Jewish, white, separated, a math teacher

Aaron, M., 39

Deborah's younger brother, works in advertising

Chad, M., 41

African-American, gay, Deborah's best friend, works in IT

Marcus, M, 43

Chad's estranged older brother, an actor who lives in LA

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A draft of *Caught* was completed as part of my Master's Thesis at NYU, which included studying relationships between Blacks and Jews on the stage. There have been three readings of this play: at the Anne Frank Conference at Buffalo State College, as part of my master's thesis and at The Drama Book Shop as part of their "After Hours" readings. Special thanks to Carlos Jones, who had lengthy discussions with the playwright about this piece.

The bland white light of the television reflects shadows on the room in an otherwise pitch-black studio apartment. The TV is on mute. Clothes are splayed all over the couch. Boxes are everywhere. The sounds of a storm and rain hitting the windows. DEBORAH, wearing a long t-shirt and nothing else, is taping a big gray X over one of the large windows on the back wall. The ceilings are high. Bottles of water cover a countertop.

The sound of someone rattling the door rushes Deborah into a panic. She looks quickly for something--a bat, a knife--but everything is packed. She grabs a coat hanger. As the door opens, she slams it shut.

AARON

(from outside the door) Owwww!

She recognizes the voice and opens the door. The light from the hallway streams in. It's AARON. He is clean-cut, good-looking, in a business suit and raincoat. He carries a soaked umbrella. His hand is over his head. Deborah holds out her hand for the keys.

DEBORAH

Give them to me!

AARON

You gave them to me.

DEBORAH

For emergencies.

AARON

And this is!

DEBORAH

What? *What?*

Aaron turns on an overhead light.

AARON

This is how people die, Deborah.

DEBORAH

Coat hangers?

She chases him around her couch.

AARON

If you had a gun, I'd be dead—

Aaron trips on her clothes.

She tries to get the keys and misses them, ending up on her couch with the hanger in her hand.

Be careful with that thing. You might have to hang up something. . . .Why didn't you laugh?

DEBORAH

If you said something funny, I'd laugh.

Deborah pops up. Aaron turns around and she reaches around him and grabs the keys, shoving them into her pocket.

AARON

I'm getting those back.

He hands her a pair of pants. She puts them on.

AARON

Do you have any Tylenol?

DEBORAH

Is that your emergency? A headache?

AARON

I have a headache because *someone slammed a door in my head--*

The sound of thunder.

Deborah places another gray tape X over the window. She stands on a stool to reach a higher window.

AARON

What are you doing?

DEBORAH

The storm.

AARON

That doesn't do anything, you know.

She keeps taping.

And it's not that bad yet.

She keeps taping.

We tried your cell, Facebook, email, texting, for *three days*.

She turns and looks at him.

DEBORAH

Three days is not an emergency!

AARON

In the land of Jewish, it most certainly is. Mom and Dad are worried sick.

DEBORAH

Why?

AARON

Because I told them we hadn't heard from you.

DEBORAH

Uuugghhh. Stop acting like I left the country.

AARON

York Avenue is practically another country.

DEBORAH

How did you even know I'd be home?

AARON

All the schools are closed. Your niece misses you. Your niece wants to know—

DEBORAH (overlapping after the first “niece”)
I had dinner with y’all last week! And stop calling her my niece.

AARON

That’s who she is.

DEBORAH

But you keep saying it just to make me feel bad.

Aaron walks over to her.

AARON

She wants to know if you’ll sit in the front row at her play that opens and closes tomorrow.

She turns to him.

DEBORAH

Shit. Now I feel bad.

AARON

And she is not just playing a leaf or a fairy. Hippo— (looking on his phone)

DEBORAH

She’s playing a Hippo?

AARON

Hippo-lyta.

DEBORAH

It’s Hippolyta.

AARON

You’re going.

DEBORAH

Of course.

AARON

And Chad says he hasn’t heard from you since the funeral.

She puts out her hand, indicating his coat.

DEBORAH

You’re dripping.

He hands it to her. She shoves it into a closet and walks away. Aaron takes it out and folds the coat, placing it on a chair.

AARON

You know, the apartment could use a little Feng Shui.

DEBORAH

I'll get right on that.

AARON

You don't have a flight, do you?

DEBORAH

I'll book a train.

AARON

What about setting up for the party?

DEBORAH

It's at the Davis Hotel; there is no set up--

AARON (overlapping)

Because I did most of the work already—

DEBORAH

What did you do—*drive* to Virginia and make flower arrangements for the tables?

AARON

I--made phone calls. A lot of phone calls. Because I didn't want Mom and Dad's 50th anniversary to be thrown together willy nilly. Where do you think that expression comes from—willy nilly?

Deborah suddenly feels ill. She can't hide it. She's already heading towards the bathroom. Offstage, she starts coughing and gags. Aaron yells--

AARON

I didn't mind doing the work for the party. (a moment) I forgive you. (a moment) Maybe you should go back to that yoga class with that guru guy you like so much.

DEBORAH

You mean the one that told me my life has infinite possibilities?

And gags again.

AARON

Yes.

Aaron takes the Xs off the window. He looks out the windows to another building, which should be visible to the audience. Rain splashes down the windows.

AARON

(yelling) Remember how we used to think Dad was so weird doing all that weird breathing in the morning before school? And now you do that stuff too. Or you did. Before. And maybe you should do it again. I can't even touch my toes.

He tries and hurts his back.

See?

Aaron notices an easel and a painting, a white canvas with black splotches. It's crooked. He fixes it.

So great you're painting again! What's it going to be?

DEBORAH

It's finished.

AARON

Ohhh—I like it. It's—nice—really--nice.

The sound of running water. Aaron approaches the couch and shifts the clothes to one side, bunching them together into a huge pile on one corner of the couch. He finds the remote and turns off the TV.

I'm sorry about suggesting you guys get back together. You just seemed so—and he just seemed so--Did you notice I didn't bring up Ron's name once, well, just the once.

She returns, hair in a ponytail, wiping her mouth with a wash cloth.

DEBORAH

What did you do with my clothes?

AARON

They're right here.

He shows her.

DEBORAH

Move—you're messing them up.

AARON

Oh, I'm sorry.

He throws a few articles of clothing across the couch.

Better?

DEBORAH

Yes.

A moment.

AARON

Look, I—I should have offered to--I didn't realize--

Aaron gets up and starts stacking boxes downstage. Deborah notices the Xs are gone and replaces one carefully. Aaron continues to stack boxes.

You're going to feel so much better once you've unpacked and you start saluting the sun again--

She starts crying--

Or don't salute the sun. Fuck the sun and that guy Om Shanti, Shanti. What does he know anyway?

DEBORAH (overlapping)

Om shanti, shanti is not a person.

AARON

I just want you to be happy.

DEBORAH

Now you sound like Mom.

AARON

I like Mom.

Deborah places another X on the window.

DEBORAH

Did you know there are fewer murders on rainy days?

AARON

No, I had no--

DEBORAH

It's true. The average number of homicides for ten Saturdays this past summer was twenty-four. And when there's an inch of rain on those Saturdays, there's only eighteen murders. That's six people who are alive, just because we've had more rain. Don't you see, when we have sunshine, more people die. The irony is so sad. Don't you think it's--

AARON

Deborah, please, you can come stay with us for a while if you—

DEBORAH

I am forty-two years old. I'm not going to be the crazy sister and live with you and your wife and your daughter.

AARON

We are your family. And it looks like you need some right now.

DEBORAH

I am fine!

She turns and throws up into the kitchen sink. Aaron turns on the kitchen light. It's really bad hospital lighting. He notices a small plastic trash can filled with pregnancy test boxes. He pulls them out of the trash and holds them in his arms.

AARON

EPT? First Response? Pregnant Now? (He gasps.) You are pregnant now!

He hugs her and the boxes go flying out of his hands.

That's just what they say. When you stop trying, it happens.

He moves her boxes from downstage towards the door.

AARON

I'm so stupid. You wanted to tell the family all together. No wonder you didn't want to get unpacked!

DEBORAH (overlapping)

Aaron, no, what are you--

AARON (continuous)

I'm such an idiot. I'm calling Ron; we're playing basketball next weekend! Now that you're getting back together, I can tell you--I've really missed him and--

DEBORAH (overlapping)

No, no, no, don't call Ron--

AARON (overlapping)

We are going to throw you a shower!

DEBORAH (overlapping)

No--no--you're not--

He keeps stacking boxes.

AARON

When Rebecca had little Sarah, I became the breastfeeding aficionado. We'll buy you a heavy-duty hospital-grade model pump, you know, with a double collection kit, that way when you go back to work--

DEBORAH (overlapping)

Aaron--Aaron!

AARON

What? (looking at her) What?

DEBORAH

Remember when we took those horrible vacations to Uncle Abe's for Thanksgiving, and we'd fight over the back seat?

AARON

Uh, yeah, sure--

DEBORAH (overlapping)

And you promised you'd give me **all** of the candy fish if you could have three quarters of the back seat, and I measured because you're so lousy at math. And every time you'd wait until we got there and then you'd eat all the candy yourself, leaving me totally without any candy at all.

AARON

Deborah, we were like *ten*.

DEBORAH

It's like how do I know if I can really trust you?

He stops moving the boxes and sits.

AARON

Having big mood swings is normal. Rebecca did too. Is that it?

DEBORAH

No.

AARON

Then what is it?

The sound of the buzzer.

DEBORAH

Who is that?

AARON

I have no idea.

Aaron walks towards the door. He holds down the talk sign.

(into the intercom) Hi Chad. (to her) Surprise!

DEBORAH (overlapping)

What? No, no, no. Don't let him up.

AARON

(In the intercom) Come on up.

Aaron buzzes Chad into the building.

Why wouldn't you want to celebrate with your best friend?

DEBORAH (overlapping)

Listen. Please don't say anything about me being pregnant. I—um—want to tell him at the party, with everyone else.

There is a knock at the door.

AARON

(signals he's going to keep his mouth shut and then) I am so happy for you.

And another knock.

AARON (cont.)

But my lips are sealed.

And a third knock.

Mums the word.

DEBORAH

Just open the door!

Aaron opens the door for Chad, handsome, wearing a fashionable suit. He holds a duffel bag, a bag of bagels, and a ripped umbrella.

AARON

(beaming) Everything's fine. It's just great.

CHAD

(to Aaron) Well, sunshine, that's good to know. Here.

He hands Aaron a bag of bagels.

AARON

Fantastic. I'm starved.

Aaron opens the bag and starts chomping. Chad walks around the room tentatively, wiping the rain off of his legs.

Deborah tries to clear some space for him to sit. Chad remains standing and looks out the window facing another building.

CHAD

Nice view.

DEBORAH

If you lie on the floor you can see a little sky. (silence) I--I was going to call. . . . But then I'd be all crying and you'd be all crying.

CHAD

Yeah, it's best to do those things by yourself.

He reaches into his pocket and hands her a small jewelry box.

CHAD

Open it.

A moment. She opens it. It's an opal ring.

DEBORAH

I'm surprised she didn't want one of your cousins to have it.

CHAD

It was in her will. For the princess who hasn't left this palace.

DEBORAH

Princess?

CHAD

I helped you. I helped you pack up your place but you haven't---

DEBORAH

You kept making jokes.

CHAD

Yeah, so--

DEBORAH (overlapping)

Every stupid object in that apartment reminded me of Ron. And you kept saying that I'm better off without that douchebag.

CHAD

He is a douchebag.

AARON

Now let's not be too hard on Ron.

CHAD

(to Deborah) It's been six weeks.

DEBORAH (overlapping)

I drove to Virginia, too--I sat with your mother for two days straight. I held her hand--

CHAD

I'm talking about *since* the funeral. I'm talking about me. *Me* in Peaksville, Virginia, and *me* in New York and you no where—

DEBORAH

This has been a loss for me, too.

CHAD

My father has been sitting in my mother's walk-in closet. Just sitting in the dark. Last weekend, I flew to Virginia after work and said, "Dad, it's time." It was like, maybe, just maybe if I got rid of some of her things, Dad would start living again. So I packed her clothes while he sat in a chair in the middle of her closet. She owned twenty-seven sweaters and seventeen pairs of shoes; I've taken seven trips to the Salvation Army. Doug and Aaron joined me for two of them. And you and Marcus. Zero. My mother wanted you to have my grandmother's ring--and this (picking up a duffel bag) and you haven't called once since the funeral. Not once. My homophobic brother came home for *one day* for his own mother's funeral; he didn't even spend the night. Marcus didn't acknowledge Doug, didn't thank Doug for all the times we drove back and forth on boring ass interstate 95—for all the times we sat on Amtrak, in the airport, in the hospital, in her room; Marcus didn't even say "hello" or give him so much as a "fuck you." And normally, you would've already known all of this if you hadn't had your head up your ass. So don't talk to me about *all of your loss*—

He heads towards the door, grabbing his things--

You were right Aaron, this was a great idea. I feel better already.

Aaron gently guides Chad back and encourages him to sit.

AARON

Isn't it nice that Chad brought you the ring that meant so much to his family and isn't it nice that Deborah—will wear it. For the rest of her life. And our families will always be connected. (silence) What else might be in that bag for Deborah from Mama S?

He jumps up and makes a beeline for the bag. Chad doesn't stop him. Aaron sits between them. Deborah perks up.

AARON

Look at this-- theatre ticket stubs to *ART*—your first Broadway show! Our moms brought you two to New York for your 16th Birthday and you went to that restaurant--with the swings. And you came home talking about "It's a play about—art or--"