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Words

by

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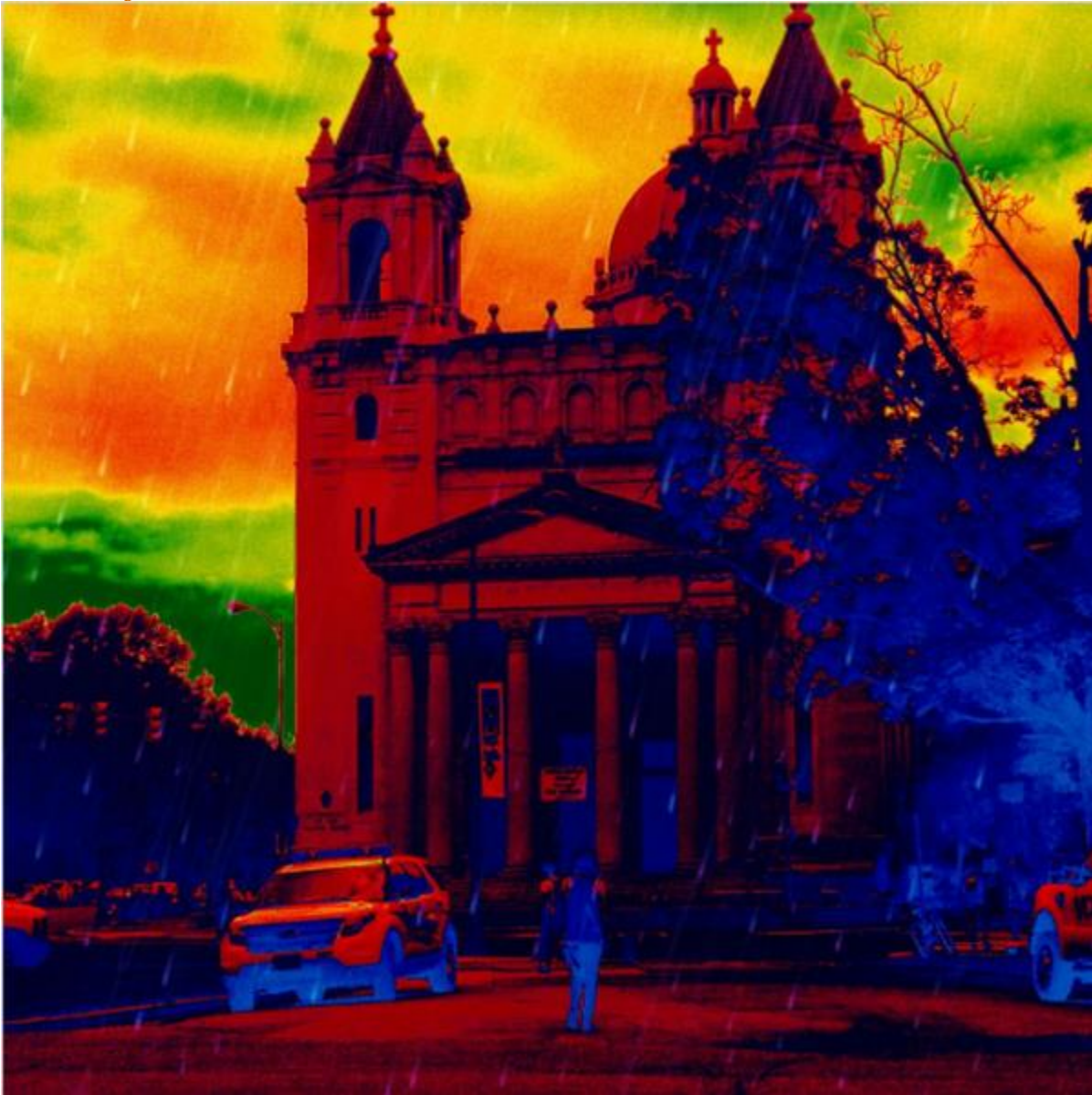
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Outside the temple [Emanu-El], fans and photographers crowded the sidewalks behind police barricades. . . . Cameras clicked wildly as the guests went in, among them Joy Behar; Mario Buatta; Kathie Lee Gifford; Whoopi Goldberg; Hoda Kotb; Rosie O'Donnell; Dr. Mehmet Oz; Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick, her husband; Charlie Rose; Diane Sawyer; Chuck Scarborough; Paul Shaffer; Donald J. Trump; and Barbara Walters. . . . Howard Stern described her [Joan Rivers] as a 'troublemaker, trail blazer, pioneer for comics everywhere, never apologizing and

never caring what people thought.’ . . . ‘She [Rivers] did everything on her own terms,’ said Mr. Stern. . . . ‘She fought the stereotypes that women can’t be funny, they should stay in their place, stay home,’ he said.—James Barron, [“At Joan Rivers’s Memorial, Celebrities, Cameras and Crowd,” New York Times, September 7, 2014.](#)

Joan Rivers’ memorial service held at Temple Emanu-El was a private event. Professor Mimi Barmiztvahwitz, a feminist science fiction scholar, joined the general public standing along both Fifth Avenue and East Sixty-Fifth Street. She tearfully regarded the media truck throng, the paparazzi jockeying for position, and the array of celebrities arriving with an eye toward being seated by the 11:00AM start time. At precisely 10:50AM, a flying saucer landed on Temple Emanu-El’s roof.

All the Jewish mourners—including Barbara Walters, Howard Stern, and Mimi (Whoopi Goldberg, despite her last name, does not belong in this category)--looked up and said “oy” in quiet unison. Walters was prepared to come out of retirement to get this biggest “get” of her career.

The spaceship flew down from the roof and landed in front of the Temple’s main entrance. The ship’s hatch opened. When the observers peered within, they saw an opulent interior festooned with gold leaf wall decorations, French provincial furniture, and chandeliers appropriate to the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. As they waited for the alien to appear, they expected it to look like Louis XIV. This expectation, although logical, was false. A petite perfectly coiffed and fully made up woman of a certain age emerged. She was wearing a gold sequined lamé blazer, a matching boa, black pants, and a giant sparkling necklace. Who was she wearing? No one could say with certainty.

“It’s Joan!” shouted Ms. Rivers’ close friend Margie Stern.

Charlie Rose walked up to Ms. Stern, gently took her hand, and calmly and authoritatively said, “She can’t be Joan. Joan is dead. She was cremated yesterday.”

Donald Trump tried to control the situation. He grabbed a microphone and shouted, “I demand to see this woman’s birth certificate. If she can’t produce her birth certificate, and I insist upon an original copy, then she’s not American. She’s an alien.”

“Donald, she is definitely not American. She is an alien, in fact. Barbara and I will try to interview her,” said Rose.

“What the fuck,” interjected Howard Stern. “Even though her vagina must be very dry, even though she looks like Joan and she walks like Joan, she’s not Joan. This Joan impersonator is a potential threat to national security. We need New York’s highest ranking local official to come here fuckin’ ASAP. Call fuckin’ de Blasio,” he barked at the assembled police.

Upon arrival, the Mayor scrutinized the flying saucer which had landed on Earth's most expensive real estate. "I estimate that this outer space vehicle's interior space, located in this neighborhood, is worth at least forty million dollars. Maybe I can commandeer it via eminent domain, sell it, and use the profit to keep my campaign promise to build affordable housing," he said. Mimi did not think that the Mayor's intention was farfetched or unreal in terms of New York real estate. She had been killing time before the memorial service began by reading a *Curbed* article called "[Sustainable Earthship Tries to Take Off on The Lower East Side.](#)" Perhaps the Mayor was familiar with Zoe Rosenberg's following description of the project:

The alien idea of erecting an 'earthship' on an empty lot on Pitt Street . . . in the Lower East Side is still very present. . . . [B]ut with the building's new top-heavy shape, the structure may be bound to the realm of the imagined. 'Earthship in the Sky' is the brainchild of Taos, NM-based architect Michael Reynolds. The structure is a 'fully independent home that heats and cools itself without fossil fuel.' . . . Like most space things, whether this idea will take off or fail to launch has yet to be seen.

Only in New York could a flying saucer ensconced on Fifth Avenue, "[l]ike most space things," be launched as a viable real estate opportunity.

Goldberg, Joy Behar, and Walters discussed their view points about the alien in terms of *The View*. They articulated the terrified crowds' consensus opinion: at Rivers' memorial service, no one should harm a Rivers clone--even she was an extraterrestrial.

At this juncture, Mimi knew that she had step forward to try to save the day. "Excuse me", she said to the nearest police officer.

"I am a feminist science fiction scholar. The extraterrestrial could be a feminist alien. This is a job for Professor Mimi Barrmitzvahwitz."

The officer, while introducing Mimi to the Mayor, explained her particular scholarly expertise to him. De Blasio granted her permission to attempt to communicate with the Joan from the stars.

Mimi first spoke to Joshua Davidson, the Rabbi in charge of the memorial service. "Rabbi, is there a red carpet in the Temple's storage room?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact there is."

"Please have the staff spread it out in front of the saucer's open hatch. I would like this Joan to use it to alight; it could make her feel welcome after a, I suppose, long flight."

Mimi used the time it took to find and lay the carpet to address the alien.

“Can we talk?” Mimi loudly asked the alien Joan resplendently standing at the edge of the flying saucer’s open door.

“Yo,” answered the alien exuberantly while waving her golden boa.

Thinking that she spoke Spanish, the Mayor called in Manhattan City Council members Rosie Mendez and Ydanis Rodriguez.

“Dónde vive usted? Cómo te llamas?” Mendez and Rodriguez asked. There was no answer. The alien looked confused.

Temple staff members were by now placing the red carpet in front of the saucer. The alien perked up, walked down the saucer’s gang plank, exuberantly waved to the crowd, and walked the red carpet.

“Who are you wearing?” asked Mimi.

“Satamhcs,” the alien matter-of-factly answered.

No one in the huge crowd knew from what “satamhcs” meant. Sensing that she was failing to communicate, the alien waved her hand and snapped her fingers. A giant necklace made of out of this world ostentatious huge red flashing rubies appeared. She walked up to Mimi and placed the necklace around the feminist science fiction scholar’s neck. Mimi, recognizing that the necklace was worth a fortune, thought that she could sell it to raise enough money to fund a new university entirely dedicated to science fiction studies. Mimi blew a thank you kiss at the alien and turned to the Mayor.

“We can’t communicate with her. But, at least she’s friendly. She gave me this priceless necklace. I can place it over my head which has definitely not been blasted off with a zap gun.”

“True. Okay. I won’t call Barack and ask him to send in the military. But, we have to talk to her. What do you suggest, Professor Barrmitzvahwitz?”

“I think I should consult Whoopi,” Mimi answered. “Ms. Goldberg, you played Guinan on *Star Trek*. You have *Star Trek* credentials. I have feminist science fiction scholarly expertise. Maybe our combined experience can be effective. Let’s both scream ‘beam down immediately if not sooner’ and see what happens.”

They screamed in unison. Lt. Uhura appeared.

“Hello Guinan. What can I do for you?” Uhura asked Whoopi.

“I’m not Guinan. I just played her on TV. I’m Whoopi Goldberg. This is twenty-first

century New York. But, be that as it may, perhaps you can help us. You are a Communications Officer. We are having difficulty communicating with an alien. This Joan Rivers clone is speaking an extraterrestrial language which Earthlings can't understand. Can we talk? No. What should we do?"

"Who is Joan Rivers? What planet does she come from?" asked Uhura.

"She doesn't come from a planet. She came from Larchmont. She was one of the greatest comedic talents of our time," answered Mimi. "She died suddenly a few days ago. Her like will never be seen on Earth again. Even though this Joan clone is peaceful and generous, she is not *our* Joan. But, we need to talk to her. How can we talk to her?"

"The Prime Directive prevents me from making suggestions. Even if I were free to help, I am not familiar enough with your popular culture to be useful. But, I can say that you should adhere to reality. Consult an existing extraterrestrial language expert. Captain Kirk needs me to open up a hailing frequency addressed to some invading Klingons. Ms. Goldberg, you are still Guinan to me. Nice to meet you all and good luck. Bye now." Uhura beamed up.

"Professor Barrmitzvahwitz, now what? We can't leave this Joan clone forever standing in front of a synagogue on a red carpet," said the Mayor.

"We should follow Uhura's advice. I am acquainted with a linguist named Suzette Haden Elgin. She wrote a feminist science fiction novel about communicating with extraterrestrials called *Native Tongue*. Elgin is perfect."

A mayoral aide reached Elgin via cell phone and handed the phone to Mimi. "Yes, hello Mimi," said Elgin. "I remember when we met at the Science Fiction Research Association Conference held in Chicago. What can I do for you?"

Mimi explained the situation.

"Well, I can't ensconce you within *Native Tongue* and enable you to communicate with aliens in the manner of my protagonist Nazareth Chornyak. But, maybe my expertise in linguistics could be useful. What exactly did the Joan clone say?"

"Yo' and 'Satamhcs'," answered Mimi.

"Yo' and 'Satamhcs?' The key to this code is perfectly clear. We do not need my feminist science fiction novels to provide an answer. The alien is speaking an extraterrestrial version of Yiddish which is slightly different from Earth's real European language Yiddish. It seems that she read *Through the Looking Glass* in preparation for her trip to Earth. Mimi, write the words that the alien said, hold them up to a mirror, and look in the mirror."

Mimi reached into her purse for a mirror. She followed Elgin's directions. She saw two words: "oy" and "schmatas." The alien's meaning was no longer lost in translation. Extraterrestrial Yiddish was revealed to be merely European Earth Yiddish spelled backwards.

"Thank you so much for your help, Suzette" said Mimi as she turned off her phone.

"Sir," she said to the Mayor. "I now understand how to speak to the Joan clone. I will test my hypothesis."

Mimi walked up the red carpet and stood eye to eye with the alien.

"Sirust?" said Mimi.

"Sirust?" questioned the alien. "Hef. Hatacaf ehcsiyog shasmom iarezahc!"

Mimi used a pad and her mirror. She understood the alien and sensed that she should, for the moment, keep what the alien said to herself. "Mayor de Blasio, please have experts from YIVO, you know the Yiddish language center on Sixteenth Street, come up here immediately. Ask them to bring mirrors," she requested.

The Yiddish speakers arrived and chatted with the alien via mirror reflection. They soon learned that the extraterrestrial was from the Planet of the Outspoken and Brilliant Jewish New York Earth Women Clones. The alien explained that, whenever an outspoken Jewish New York Earth Woman dies, her extraterrestrial clone travel to Earth to document her accomplishments. Bella Abzug, Nora Ephron, Susan Sontag, Wendy Wasserstein, and Betty Friedan clones are living among us. These clones, like Uhura, adhere to the Prime Directive; they do not make their presence known to Earthlings. Joan Rivers' clone, however, is just too over the top to adhere to any rule in the universe.

Alien Joan realized that she could now be understood. She intuited that the answer to "can we talk?" was now affirmative. Without further hesitation, she walked down the red carpet and engaged the crowd. A torrent of words emerged from her lips. Armed with notepads and mirrors, the Yiddish scholars soon noted that she was expressing her views about the celebrities' attire. The Joan clone said that Sarah Jessica Parker's pink shoes were inappropriate for a memorial service. She called Goldberg's separate blue and red sneakers a fashion atrocity appropriate for the "don't tread on me" American flag. According to the Yiddish scholars' exact translation, the alien stated "Barbara Walters' big beige hat looks like she's wearing a flying saucer on her head--and who knows form flying saucers and what they look like better than me? Oy gevalt, Earth women appear like they are from another planet. I can't wait to go home to my own planet."

Mimi requested that the Yiddish translators ask the alien if she would return to Earth several times a year to host *The Fashion Police*. The answer was affirmative. The alien, in fact, stipulated to the E! Network that she would do the special Academy Award *Fashion Police* show. And, by the way, she added that Outspoken Jewish New York Earth Woman Clones live forever.

The mourners tried their best to put the tumult behind them and pay their respects to Earth's one and only Joan Rivers. While the celebrities entered Temple Emanu-El, Mimi, lacking an invitation because she was not a V.I.P., remained outside with the general public. She was relieved to know that Ms. Rivers' fans--and their descendants--would be forever able to hear an extraterrestrial Joan clone, for the rest of human history, articulating Joan Rivers' brilliant verbal meshagas. After all, a Joan Rivers from another planet who spoke extraterrestrial Yiddish was better than no Joan at all.

Mimi clutched the glittering ruby necklace the alien had given her. Although it was priceless, she knew that she would never sell it. The necklace was more precious to her than the ability to establish a university entirely dedicated to generating feminist science fiction scholarship. She discerned that she should adhere to the Prime Directive. All her attention to feminist science fiction yielded the insight that it was just too dangerous for an outspoken Jewish New York Earth woman to alter reality.

Joan Rivers was Professor Mimi Barrmiztvahwitz's hero. She emulated Rivers' brilliance, courage, wit, success at being a revered and relevant octogenarian, and sartorial splendor. She reasoned that if Joan could survive her husband's suicide, Johnny Carson's rebuff, and career disappointments, she could damn the torpedoes and go full speed ahead as a feminist science fiction scholar. She could move forward sans the out of this world financial windfall the necklace could garner. Mimi would cherish the Joan clone's gift to her forever.

But, since Mimi was, indeed, a genre fiction expert, she could not avoid thinking that the ruby necklace might have something in common with those iconic ruby slippers. Perhaps she could do something to it that could cause a fantastic occurrence to happen. But, that is another story about how Mimi travels to the Joan clone's home, the Planet of the Outspoken Jewish New York Earth Women Clones. She arrives attired in a gold lamé spacesuit accessorized with a silver boa and her beloved necklace.

"Who are you wearing," the assembled clones ask in backwards Yiddish.

"Barrmiztvahwitz," Mimi answers. "To get just the right look, I had to give up on NASA and design my spacesuit myself." Then, she walks down a red carpet and says, "miahc'l."