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—Charles Isherwood, *The New York Times*

# When January Feels Like Summer



By Cori Thomas

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# When January Feels Like Summer



**Drama/Comedy. By Cori Thomas.**

*Cast: 3m., 1w., 1 pre-op transgender (m. to w.) who can be played by either gender (prefer transgender).* Five characters stumble toward the possibilities of being seen, being heard and being loved one unusually warm January day in Harlem.

Devaun and Jeron are two young African-American men who are looking to earn respect in the neighborhood.

Nirmala Singh and her brother, Ishan, run a small neighborhood grocery store. Nirmala's husband, Prasad, has been in a coma for three years after a robbery gone wrong. Ishan desperately wants gender reassignment surgery so he can transition to female, change his name to Indira and start a dating service. He wants Nirmala to pull the plug and cash in Prasad's million-dollar life insurance to fund his surgery. Devaun and Jeron's door-to-door poster campaign to make the neighborhood aware of a sex predator brings them into the store and into the lives of Nirmala and Indira. Indira's first attempt at matchmaking is with Joe, a lonely neighborhood sanitation worker with a crush on Nirmala. Meanwhile, Devaun is smitten with pre-op Indira, who agrees to go out on a date with him. *Flexible set. Approximate running time: 120 minutes. Code: WJ7.*

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“A fresh take on the traditional romantic comedy.” —*The Theater Mirror*

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*Back cover: Ensemble Studio Theatre and Page 73 Productions, New York City, featuring (l-r) Maurice Williams, Mahira Kakkar and J. Mallory McCree. Photo: Gerry Goodstein. Cover design: Cristian Pacheco.*

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By  
CORI THOMAS



**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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“*When January Feels Like Summer* was originally produced by City Theatre, Pittsburgh, and was developed at City Theatre as a part of its Momentum new play festival.”

“The New York City premiere of *When January Feels Like Summer* was produced by The Ensemble Studio Theatre and Page 73 Productions.”

“*When January Feels Like Summer* was developed, in part, with the assistance of the Sundance Institute Theatre Program.”

*When January Feels Like Summer* was originally produced by City Theatre, Pittsburgh, in March 2010 and was developed at City Theatre as a part of its Momentum new play festival.

Cast:

Devaun ..... Joshua Elijah Reese  
Jeron ..... Carter Redwood  
Nirmala ..... Gita Reddy  
Ishan/Indira ..... Debargo Sanyal  
Joe ..... John Marshall Jones

Creative Team:

Director ..... Chuck Patterson  
Set ..... Anne Mundell  
Lights ..... Allen Hahn  
Sound ..... Rob Kaplowitz  
Costumes ..... Ange Nesco  
Artistic Director ..... Tracy Brigden  
Dramaturg ..... Carlyn Aquiline

The New York City premiere of *When January Feels Like Summer* was produced by The Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST) and Page 73 Productions in May 2014.

Cast:

Devaun ..... Maurice Williams  
Jeron ..... J. Mallory McCree  
Nirmala ..... Mahira Kakkar  
Ishan/Indira ..... Debargo Sanyal  
Joe ..... Dion Graham

Creative Team:

Director ..... Daniella Topol  
Set ..... Jason Simms

Lights ..... Austin Smith  
Sound ..... Shane Rettig  
Costumes..... Sydney Maresca  
Artistic Directors..... William Carden (EST),  
Asher Richelli and Liz Jones (Page 73 Productions)  
Dramaturg ..... Michael Walkup

The show was remounted and co-produced by Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST) and Women’s Project Theater at Ensemble Studio Theatre in October 2014.

Cast:

Devaun ..... Maurice Williams  
Jeron ..... Carter Redwood  
Nirmala ..... Mahira Kakkar  
Ishan/Indira ..... Debargo Sanyal  
Joe ..... Dion Graham

Creative Team:

Director ..... Daniella Topol  
Set ..... Jason Simms  
Lights ..... Austin Smith  
Sound ..... Shane Rettig  
Costumes..... Sydney Maresca  
Artistic Directors..... William Carden (EST),  
Lisa McNulty (Women’s Project Theater)  
Dramaturg ..... Michael Walkup



For Chuck Patterson

# When January Feels Like Summer

## CHARACTERS

Devaun  
Jeron  
Nirmala  
Ishan/Indira  
Joe

## PRODUCTION NOTES

1. A statue of Ganesha should be visible throughout the play but should not upstage the rest of the set. A small, house-sized statuette placed somewhere in Nirmala's apartment is fine. It should be noticed at the very beginning when she touches it and then sort of fade into the woodwork until the moment when his presence becomes important. However, it is important that he remain somewhat visible throughout.
2. Prasad should never be seen. We should hear the hospital sounds, but he can be placed in the audience or the wings.
3. The last scene takes place on a subway platform. Hopefully the stage can be made to look like one as best as possible. In any case, a yellow line should run along the edge of the stage as if the audience is the subway car. The actors step forward toward the audience at the end.

## TEXT NOTES

“Didi” is an affectionate Hindi term for sister

Lorraine is pronounced with French accent Lor-äns'

# When January Feels Like Summer

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

*(In the dark, we hear the sounds of a subway train approaching and the doors opening. Lights up on a subway car; ISHAN, dressed in business suit and tie and carrying a briefcase, exits as DEVAUN, age 20, and JERON, age 19, enter just as doors are about to close. Both are dressed in light jackets more suited to fall or spring weather. They speak to each other in a loud and animated manner without any consideration for fellow train passengers. JOE, an African American man, is sitting, perhaps reading a paper. He is dressed in a light windbreaker or his sanitation-worker's uniform. He has an umbrella with him. From time to time, they get very loud, they may bump into him. He looks up at them without really seeing them. He is irritated by them.)*

CONDUCTOR. Stand clear of the closing doors please.

*(DEVAUN is testing ring tones on his cellphone, JERON listens.)*

DEVAUN. Whatchu think about this one?

*(He tries another one.)*

JERON. Naw man, you got to get somethin' Kanye or somethin'. Those programmable tunes sound wack.

DEVAUN. You know Shirleethia?

JERON. Who?

DEVAUN. Shirleethia.

JERON. I don't know her.

DEVAUN. She work at the Ocean Deli on the corner.

JERON. What corner?

DEVAUN. My corner.

JERON. Beside them subway steps?

DEVAUN. Yeah.

JERON. Why you call it Ocean?

DEVAUN. That's its name.

JERON. It ain't called no Ocean. It's called Oscar, man. Oscar Deli. Why you call it Ocean?

DEVAUN. You sho?

JERON. People name their stores for somethin' and shit. Like for example, they wives or they daughters or theyselves. That place ain't by no ocean, so why he gon' go and call it ocean. His name is Oscar that's why he named it that way.

DEVAUN. Oh.

JERON. You talking about that place Kareem hang out selling Newports? By the steps to the subway?

DEVAUN. Man, all this time I been callin' it Ocean. It look like Ocean on the sign.

JERON. O-S-C-A-R don't look like no ocean to me. Can't you read?

*(JOE nods off slightly.)*

DEVAUN. Yeh, yeh I can read, I just thought it say Ocean.

JERON. Belee me, you ain't gon' find no good tunes in that phone. You gotta get a download.

CONDUCTOR. Stand clear of the closing doors please.

DEVAUN. Yeh, yeh.

JERON. It got a camera and radio?

DEVAUN. Yeh, I think so.

*(DEVAUN hands the phone to JERON, who begins to check it.)*

JERON. You better figure out how to use this shit.

*(JERON snaps a photo of JOE sleeping.)*

JERON. Instagram hashtag sleeping on the train.

*(They laugh.)*

DEVAUN. Yeh. Shirleethia got all them ring tunes. She say she know somebody can do a download and shit.

JERON. I don't know who she is.

DEVAUN. She the one at the Ocean, I mean Oscar deli.

JERON. Light skin girl, nice rump?

DEVAUN. Yeh, she nice. She real nice.

JERON. I know her, yeh, she nice 'cept for that tooth, man.

DEVAUN. Yeh man, she need to do somethin' 'bout that tooth.

JERON *(laughing)*. That shit ain't funny.

DEVAUN. She look real nice if she keep her mouth closed.

JERON. The minute she open her mouth, Whoa. Stand back!

*(Making sign of the cross.)* Tooth stick straight out, man. Straight out!

DEVAUN. I would get with her 'cept for that tooth. How you gon' kiss someone got a tooth stick out like that?

JERON. You ain't. What she need to do is go get it fix up. Or get a false tooth or something.

DEVAUN. Yeh. She ain't never gon' find no man. She could get to be old and unhappiful and what have you ...

JERON. You gon' tell her?

DEVAUN. I ain't gon' tell her nothin'. I ain't that interested. 'Cept for her behind. Girl gotta rump. You gotta hand it to her. Girly gotta rump on her. And she wear them tight jeans so you can see all her curves, and she got a real helpful nature, but then she turn and smile, make me wanna say, "Yo, keep yo tooth to yoself. Damn!"

*(They laugh. JOE gets up and leaves the train.)*

CONDUCTOR. Stand clear of the closing doors please!

JERON. You silly. What time you get off tonight?

DEVAUN. Seven.

JERON. Yeh, me too. Yo, they pay overtime at your Burger King?

DEVAUN. Yeh. But I ain't never worked no overtime hours. People say they don't like to pay overtime 'cept it's necessary.

JERON. But it's somethin', man if they got it. We ain't no slaves.

DEVAUN. Damn! No. Yeh. You right about that.

JERON. Shit! If you work too much or on a holiday they supposed to go overboard with it

DEVAUN. Yo, they give it out at your King?

JERON. Yeh, but ain't nobody never get it there either. I want to test that shit to see if it's real. I'm trying to figure out how to slide that compensation to myself. Time and a half, man. Time and a half.

*(Lights crossfade to ...)*

**SCENE 2**

*(NIRMALA, in her convenience store, talking to her brother. ISHAN is wearing the same suit we saw in the first scene. NIRMALA is wearing a coat. They stand at the counter.)*

NIRMALA. I'm not killing my husband for you, Ishan.

ISHAN. But he's dead already.

NIRMALA. If he was supposed to be dead, he would be dead.

ISHAN. Things would be so much easier.

NIRMALA. I said no. There's plenty of change in the register.

ISHAN. But I need your support.

NIRMALA. What would the people at your job think?

ISHAN. I don't care what they think. If you would just look at the facts, you'd see ...

NIRMALA. You should look at the facts. How would you be able to help me with the bills without that job? Because I'm not helping you. They'll laugh at you. They'll fire you.

ISHAN. I don't want to think about that stupid job. If you won't take advantage of Prasad's million-dollar policy, a MILLION DOLLARS. Fine! I've saved some money, and I'll just run up credit card debt!

NIRMALA. Americans are always trying to change everything, their nose, their breasts, everything. You're not an American. Why can't you just continue as you have ... because to change into a woman ... you can't go back, you would never be able to go back.

ISHAN. If you don't support me, I'll have to find a way to pay for it by myself.

NIRMALA. And at your age. You're a grown man. Twenty-eight, almost forty. You want to start anew at this age?

ISHAN. Prasad's never going to wake up again.

NIRMALA. You don't know that.

ISHAN. I do.

NIRMALA. Aren't you ashamed? To ask me to do this?

ISHAN. It's what he himself would want.

NIRMALA. How do you know that?

ISHAN. I wouldn't want a machine breathing for me. No one would. *(Beat.)* The new year has just begun. I have decided to start it on the right foot ... I want us to jump into this new year together, didi. Think about it, You and I with new beginnings to look forward to and resolutions to keep. *(Beat.)* If there was any hope for Prasad ... I wouldn't ask, you know that.

NIRMALA. If something were to go wrong with this ... gender reassignment surgery ... thing, I'd be all alone. Alone in this place by myself. *(Beat.)* Do you understand what you have to do here today?

ISHAN. You could try to meet someone new.

NIRMALA. Ishan, please pay attention to me, I'm ready to leave now. They said the bread would come today or tomorrow morning. I don't think it will still come today, because it usually comes at half past eleven, and it's one o'clock now. But just in case, the form is there ...

ISHAN. He's just being kept alive.

NIRMALA. Even still, he's alive. If they bring the bread, ask them to please take it downstairs.

ISHAN. All of that life insurance could help you too.

NIRMALA. He's still breathing.

ISHAN. A machine is breathing for him. You just have to ask them to shut it off.

NIRMALA. When the batteries come, count them first. Once you have signed the invoice, I can't complain, and he tried to trick me last month, twenty-five packages were missing. So please please count them.



ISHAN. I'll count them.

*(NIRMALA picks up a tote bag and drapes a sweater over her arm. She goes over to a Lord Ganesha statue and has a small moment of prayer, touching her forehead and then his trunk.)*

NIRMALA *(long beat)*. Don't tell me what to do, you don't know what I feel.

ISHAN. You don't know how I feel either, so don't you tell me what to do. *(Beat.)*

NIRMALA. I've got to go and then come back ... to make dinner ... for you.

*(NIRMALA exits. ISHAN gets his briefcase, opens it and takes a travel toiletry case out. He opens it and takes out a small make-up mirror. He sits it on the counter by the register.)*

ISHAN. Goodbye, Ishan. *(He takes out a lipstick, opens it and holds it up.)* Oh my God! *(He begins to apply the lipstick with trembling hands. He looks at himself in the mirror.)* This ... is who you are now ... *(Long emotional beat.)* Hello. Indira. Hello.

*(Lights crossfade to ... )*

### SCENE 3

*(DEVAUN and JERON enter a train.)*

CONDUCTOR. Stand clear of the closing doors please.

DEVAUN *(lowering his voice slightly and looking around to see he cannot be heard)*. Yo, Jeron, yo yo, you know that dude Lorraine?

JERON. Who?

DEVAUN. Lorraine man, you know Lorraine, tall skinny brotha. He got his hair comb back. Look like he got a relaxer. Look like one of them lollipops.

JERON. No man, auno know who that is? Whachu mean by he look like a lollipop?

DEVAUN. Them pops they sell for ten cents at the Bodega La Sala?

JERON. What? Whachu talkin' 'bout, fool?

DEVAUN. Not the round ones, those is five cent, these is long and twisted around, maybe two inches long. Ten cent. They come in all the flavors, in stripes, look like they going down around to the stick. It can almost seem like they twirlin'.

JERON. Yeh, yeh, yeh, hold up, you talkin' 'bout a tall dude always got a bow tie on. He got a long skinny head with greasy hair.

DEVAUN. That's Lorraine, man.

JERON. I know who you mean now, yeh, yeh, yeh.

DEVAUN. Lorraine.

JERON. He wear them purple suits and pointed shoes look like they hurt.

DEVAUN. Yeh, yeh, that's him. I think he gay.

JERON. For his sake, I hope so. Dressed the way that he is? And he got them big white womanly sunglasses with the diamond initials in the corner.

DEVAUN. Well, he got the nerve to put his hand on my shoulder, then talkin' 'bout, (*Imitating Lorraine.*) "Come with me, I got something 'special' to show you"

JERON. He say that? (*He cracks up.*) Don't make me laugh, Devaun. He ain't say that. Tell me he ain't say that to you.

DEVAUN. You got my word. I swear it on the bible. I swear it on two bibles. I was just mindin' my own business, tryin' to find the coldest Pepsi, 'cause you know you got to reach way in the back to get the cold ones, and dude step right behind me with his hand, got his glasses on too, touch my shoulder and say in a low quiet voice, "Come with me, I got something 'special' to show you." He say the special just like that, "special"! Dude gotta nerve to try and homosex me right out in the public eye and what have you?

JERON. So then what did you say to that fool?

DEVAUN. I turn to him and I say "Lorraine, you better take yo skank hand off me." He take his hand back quick. Like this. (*Shows him.*) Like he touch something hot. Then his mouth drop open, like this. (*Shows him.*) Then I bump him hard and said, "You betta fuckin' stay the fuck away from me you fuckin' fuckhead. I will fuck you the fuck up, if you don't fuck the fuck off fuckhead!"

JERON. Damn! So then what did he say?

DEVAUN. He didn't say nothin'. Just look at me with his eyes and mouth. (*Shows him.*) Like this.

JERON. You ain't serious.

DEVAUN. I'm serial, man. Only reason I didn't kill that fool is he go to the same church as my moms.

JERON. Yeh, yeh, I feel you. But wait, wait, hold up, suppose the dude, Lorraine, suppose he was just trying to christianize you. He religious. I know you seen him singing them hymns in the street on Sundays, loud and all outta tune and shit. Yo, that shit hurt your ears.

DEVAUN. Yeh, I seen and heard him. But Jeron, belee me, that ain't it.

*(NIRMALA enters the train. She looks around for a place to sit and sits between DEVAUN and JERON. They continue their conversation across her. She closes her eyes to try and escape them.)*

CONDUCTOR. Stand clear of the closing doors please.

DEVAUN. Why he gon' go and pick me? Everyone man, everyone know I got to get with my woman every day, sometimes two or three times a day even.

JERON. Two or three times a day, Devaun, I know you exaggeratin'.

DEVAUN. Man, I go see Lakwanda, and if she not there or she busy, I get wit Doreen. Yeh you seen Doreen since she lost that weight? She look sweet man, real sweet.

JERON. Yeh, she look nice. She look real nice, Jamal say he gon get wit her.

DEVAUN. He better stay away from her. She ain't no free agent.

JERON. Yo, yo, yo, you can't be greedy, Devaun, keepin' them two or three women outta circulation just for your own convenience. You got all them women hooked up witchu. How you do that? You should be spreadin' that shit around, like you say, equanimibly, man.

*(NIRMALA suddenly moans and closes her eyes.)*

JERON *(cont'd)*. Yo! You aight, miss?

*(NIRMALA opens her eyes and notices them staring intently at her.)*

DEVAUN. You aight?

NIRMALA. Oh, yes, thank you, thank you. Sorry. Sorry.