

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Samuel French Acting Edition

Detroit '67

by Dominique Morisseau

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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DETROIT ‘67 was first produced by Public Lab at The Public Theatre in New York City on February 26, 2013. The performance was directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah, with sets by Neil Patel, costumes by Emilio Esosa, lighting by Colin Young, and sound by Shane Rettig. The cast was as follows:

CHELLE Michelle Wilson
LANK Francois Battiste
BUNNY De’Adre Aziza
SLY Brandon J. Dirden
CAROLINE Samantha Soule

CHARACTERS

CHELLE (MICHELLE) – Black woman, late 30s, strong, steadfast, firm, and not easily impressed. A widow, mother, and sister. A loving heart beneath her pride.

LANK (LANGSTON) – Black man, early 30s, cool, loving, and charismatic. A dreamer. Has a special effect on women – but not a womanizer. Chelle's younger brother.

BUNNY (BONITA) – Black woman, mid-to-late 30s, fun, spunky, sexy, and joyful. A friend and sometimes a lover...Never lets nothin' get her down.

SLY (SYLVESTER) – Black man, late 30s, hip, slick, and sweet-talking. An honest hustler and numbers man. Fiercely loyal. Lank's best buddy.

CAROLINE – White woman, late 20s/early 30s, beautiful, quiet strength, troubled, soft, and mysterious. There is a world of danger behind her eyes.

SETTING

Detroit, Michigan

TIME

July 1967

ACT I

Scene One

(Lights up on the basement of a two-story home. It is an unfinished basement, but efforts have been made to make it look inviting. A little balcony with stairs spills from upstage right. A board, some cabinets and a couple of stools makeshift a bar.)

(Pictures of Motown artists adorn the walls. Proud posters of Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali. Somewhere else – a photo of Malcolm X. Big tack through Malcolm's forehead.)

(A big old freezer leans against the upstage left wall. Somewhere – a washer and dryer and sink. A few clothes hang on a line.)

(A string of Christmas lights lies on an old shabby couch, which sits in the middle of the floor. Next to it, an old recliner. Crates covered by cloth make a coffee table. A couple of pipe poles stand as pillars on both sides of the space. Height markings are somewhere on the wall. A name in cursive. A drawing of a huge four-pointed star. A huge black fist. A very bad and lumpy portrait of a brown girl.)

(Behind the couch against the wall is an old record player. It plays the Temptations "AIN'T TOO PROUD TO BEG".)

(CHELLE sings along as she works to untangle the Christmas lights. Suddenly the record skips.)

CHELLE. Dang it!

(She hurries to the record player and moves the needle past the skip. Goes back to singing. It skips again.)

CHELLE. *(cont.)* Not this part...come on!

(She goes to fix it again.)

(to the record player) You gonna behave now?

(Waits. Watches it. It seems cool. She goes back to untangling the lights. The record player skips again.)

Dang it! *(She plays with the needle.)* You got something against David Ruffin? Hunh? What's the matter? *(She waits for an answer from the player.)* Ohh...you wanted to see him in concert? Honey, me too. I was mad he didn't show up. He can sing you outta your drawls, you let 'im. But that's no reason to mess David all up right now. He ain't a bad man. Just a little troubled, maybe. But troubled don't make you bad. Can't nobody sang like him... Hell, can't nobody sang like none of the Temptations. They all got voices of honey you ask me. So don't go scratchin' up on David just cuz you mad. You let David play.

(She puts the needle back on the record. It behaves.)

That's better. Got us a party happenin' this weekend, and I need you to act right. Alright now?

(Somehow, the player agrees. Be imaginative.)

(CHELLE continues untangling the lights. It's creating much displeasure.)

CHELLE. Lawd...come on thangs! *(She tangles them more.)*

Dang it!

(A colorful knock at the top of the stairs.)

BUNNY. *(offstage)* Hey hey hey! You want some comp-naay?

CHELLE. I'm down here Bunny! Come on in...

(A firecracker of a woman, BUNNY, comes on down the steps. It is an art for her. She wears a one-piece jumpsuit, bangles everywhere, and the highest of high-heeled shoes.)

*Face fully beat with fake lashes n' all. Middle of the day?
No matter.)*

BUNNY. What's happenin' mama? Heard y'all was fixin' up for a party this weekend. Movin' the party to ya folks' place, hunh?

CHELLE. Tryin' to.

BUNNY. Y'all been quiet for a few weeks since y'all took the party outta Lank's old crib.

CHELLE. Took us a minute to get him settled back over here, that's all. Now that Daddy done joined Mama up that stairway to heaven, we figure it make more sense for him to move back in.

BUNNY. Well the folks been askin' me where to go. I been sendin' 'em over to the Dukes – hate to say.

CHELLE. You ain't!

BUNNY. I had to, Chelle! Now you know I love you like potato salad, but folks pay me to send 'em to the happenin' places. They want an after-hours joint, I gotta send 'em somewhere. With y'all off the scene, Dukes done tightened it up. Even got that new hi-five record player.

CHELLE. You mean hi-fi?

BUNNY. Whatever.

CHELLE. We just had to finish squarin' up this business with Mama and Daddy's money. Took a lil' minute. Them lawyers'll try to trick you out of your own inheritance, I swear.

BUNNY. I told ya'll to talk to my man Stubby. He woulda gave y'all a good price.

CHELLE. I told you I didn't want no lawyer named Stubby. Sounds short and fat and unprofessional.

BUNNY. Fine then. You go'on over to Hamtramack and get you one of them Steinbergs or them Zielinskis – or how you say it. See if they don't charge you both your arms and your legs. And probably your mama's legs too.

CHELLE. Not Mr. Furman. We got us a deal. I told him to work with me on these legal fees and come time for him to need a car, I got Sly on the job. Get him somethin' for a real good deal. He seem to like them odds. So he took care of us just fine.

BUNNY. You say so. *(beat)* You having Christmas in July?

CHELLE. Naw, girl. Help me with this string, will you? I'm trying to untangle this mess so we have some kinda decorations. Lank supposed to be out getting us some more bulbs for 'em, cuz half of 'em done burned out. Had these since we was little ones. Everytime I leave Lank in charge of wrapping 'em, this is what I end up with. Tangled mess.

(BUNNY helps CHELLE untangle the lights.)

BUNNY. That brother of yours shoul' got his own way of doing things, don't he?

CHELLE. You can say that again.

BUNNY. What ya'll gonna spend your folk's money on? A new car? Some baad threads?

CHELLE. Julius' college tuition is all I care about. You know that much. Use the inheritance for that, and pay off this house note with the parties. That's all I need.

BUNNY. Oooo girl, if I had me any kind of inheritance, I'd see the world. Tellin' you, I'd be in Rome and Paris and all them high 'n' mighty places with my mink coat and my painted nails and my tea and crumpets – or whatever them folks be havin'. I wanna be just like them white gals we be seein' at the picture show. Sittin' back on one of them satin sofas, fannin' myself and readin' magazines til' my man come back home from makin' his thousands to scoop me up and lay me right.

CHELLE. *(laughing)* You always lookin' for somebody to lay you right!

BUNNY. That's right, honey. 'Cept these niggers 'round here ain't bringing back no kinda thousands. Hell, they ain't even bringin' back no hundreds. 'Less them

fools done hit the numbers and picked up a big ol' stack from Sly, only thing they comin' to lay is they hair to the side with that conkaline!

CHELLE. You a mess!

BUNNY. That's why I got to do for myself, now. Keep my ear to the ground and tell folks where to get things. Go here for the best hairdo in the city. Go there if you need a new auto part. Go up if you want some good blow. Go down if you want some good bump. Go to the side if you want some down home cookin'. Go crooked if you wanna shoot the dice. Go left if you want the cheapest threads. Go right if you want the finest wine. And go to Twelfth Street if you wanna partaaaaay... And if you ain't lookin' for none of that, then what the hell you doin' in Detroit?

CHELLE. You just better be tellin' folks to come on through to 1568 Clarimount from now on, cuz the Poindexter parties are back in the neighborhood!

BUNNY. Well alright. We been missin' ya'll parties.

CHELLE. These parties gon' be better than the rest. I gave Lank some money to go'on out and pick up some new .45's.

BUNNY. Ooooh...who you gon' get? I hope he pickin' up some more Temptations.

CHELLE. You know we got the Temps.

BUNNY. And some of that Marvin Gaye? Cuz I can work my best hip roll to his voice. It just go together the best. Like his voice got some kinda magnetic pull and my hips got the charge.

CHELLE. Got Marvin. And Martha and the Vandellas. And I still got the Miracles. I'm gon' put on a good one for you right now.

(CHELLE rushes over to the record player and sets up her .45. The Miracles, "SHOP AROUND" plays.)

BUNNY. I love me some of the Miracles, too. That Smokey'll make you throw ya drawls on stage. I wanna hit him smack in the face with mine, I ever get the chance.

CHELLE. You so nasty, Bunny.

BUNNY. That's why they call me Bunny, baby.

(The record suddenly skips. Deflation.)

CHELLE. Dang it!

BUNNY. Awww nawww nawww... That ain't never gonna do...

(CHELLE rushes over to fix the record.)

(A slam upstairs. Moments later, LANK enters the basement, carrying a box of goods down the stairs.)

LANK. Bring that next one down here, Sly!

SLY. *(offstage)* Behind ya in a sec! Gotta turn off the truck!

(LANK drops the boxes in the middle of the floor.)

CHELLE. You got the stuff!

(CHELLE rushes over to the box to look through the goods.)

BUNNY. Hey there, Daddy.

LANK. Miss Bonita – Bunny herself. Lay some on me, Mama.

(BUNNY plants a sultry kiss on LANK's cheek. He taps her on the bottom. CHELLE pulls out some posters. A velvet painting. A neon light that says "Open". Some pathetic party favors.)

CHELLE. Where's the bulbs for the lights?

LANK. *(vague)* They in there.

BUNNY. You gon' save me a dance this Friday, sugar?

LANK. I got my slowest one saved for you, Bunny girl.

BUNNY. I done told the folks y'all startin' things 'round midnight. That way they don't have to wait for the clubs to close if they don't want to. Ya'll can get the jump on folks.

CHELLE. *(head in box – displeased)* Yeah, 'cuz Bunny been sending folks over to the Dukes these days.

LANK. You ain't!

BUNNY. Just 'til y'all ready to come back out right.

LANK. Oh we ready, baby. We ready. You gon' see in one second.

CHELLE. *(in the box)* These all the bulbs? This itty bitty pack? This ain't enough for the whole string. And what's with this tacky lookin' neon sign? Where's this thing supposed to go?

LANK. They was...throwin' that away down at Roscoe's Liquor Store. Got a nice color to it. Thought we could use it for somethin'...

CHELLE. Color! We have plenty of color with my Christmas lights.

LANK. Awww Chelle, don't start wrinkling your forehead, now. I got plans that's gonna make our parties outta sight!

CHELLE. Where's the drink coasters I asked you to get? I don't see them in here nowhere.

(Another door slam upstairs.)

CHELLE. And tell Sylvester to Stop Slammin' My Doors!

(SLY enters the basement carrying another box.)

SLY. Hey hey there sweet Chelle. What's happenin' Bunny?

BUNNY. Hey Sly.

(CHELLE rushes over and goes through the box before SLY can finish setting it down.)

SLY. Whoa...peddle and ease there, mama.

CHELLE. I better find my coasters in here.

LANK. You gon' find somethin' better than them coasters.

SLY. That's right, alright...

(SLY looks at LANK inquisitively. LANK shakes his head "no". CHELLE pulls out an 8-track cassette. She looks at it strangely.)

CHELLE. What the hell is this?

BUNNY. Oooo, I seen one of them before. They got 'em down at Lucky's.

CHELLE. Where're my .45's? You supposed to be gettin' that lil' Stevie Wonder. That Junior Walker everybody talkin' about. The Elgins. The Four Tops.

LANK. I told you not to sweat it, sis. I got it taken care of. Come on Sly. Let's bring it down.

SLY. You got it man.

(SLY and LANK head up the basement stairs.)

CHELLE. Bring what down? You better be bringin' down my .45's. I gave enough money for all the songs on my list.

BUNNY. Somethin' tells me they ain't givin' two shits 'bout your list.

(At the top of the stairs behind the door, SLY and LANK begin maneuvering with something.)

LANK. *(offstage)* Pick it up with that hand.

SLY. *(offstage)* Nah nah nah... I need to hold this part with that hand. You grab this part.

LANK. *(offstage)* Naw man! That don't make sense. I need to hold this part right here.

SLY. *(offstage)* Cool man, I got it. Just grab that one.

LANK. *(offstage)* I got it. Just don't drop that thing. Cost us a fortune.

SLY. *(offstage)* I got it, man. I got it. Just go'on...

(Seconds later, SLY and LANK emerge onto the balcony carrying speakers and a music system.)

CHELLE. That don't look like no .45!

LANK. This here's somethin' better than them .45's. This here's an 8-track player.

BUNNY. That's right! That's what it's called. Seen a commercial for it on TV while back.

CHELLE. Langston Hughes Poindexter! Tell me this ain't how you done spent all that money I gave you.

LANK. Now cool out for a minute, Chelle. Just listen. This here's gonna be the answer to all our problems. Tell her, Sly.

CHELLE. Naw, Sly, don't tell me.

SLY. It's true, Chelle. The 8-track player supposed to be better than a record player. You can get one in your car. You can move this thing around with you. And they say – you play some of that Smokey on this thing – his voice sound more velvet than it do right now.

BUNNY. (*intrigued*) They say that?

SLY. That's what they say, now.

CHELLE. Hmph – don't look like much to me.

LANK. Is you crazy? Look at this thing, Chelle. Ain't it beautiful? Even light up when the song play.

CHELLE. It's ugly. And weird. Look too technical. My record player plays and you can hear the needle movin' through the song. The way it dance up against the vinyl real close...that's what I like. Not no 8-track.

LANK. Give it a chance, Chelle. I'm'a set this up with Sly and then we gonna play you somethin' on it. You'll see. It sounds much better than that ol' record player.

CHELLE. (*faint*) Daddy gave me that record player.

LANK. Won't be no scratchin' on a 8-track. Song play all the way through – smooth.

BUNNY. Now that sound like somethin' you need.

LANK. Dukes ain't got nothin' like this. We'll shut them down so quick, folks'll be like – Dukes who?

SLY. It's true, Chelle. Right now, Dukes ranked number one for after hours joints in Detroit. But you tell folks you got somethin' new to listen to that Motown on, they gonna be pushin' to get through. Believe it, woman.

CHELLE. How much it cost?

LANK. Money ain't no object when it comes to quality. Tell her, Sly.

CHELLE. Naw, Sly – don't tell me nothin'! You done spent it all, didn't you? All the shoppin' money I gave you – gone, ain't it?

LANK. You see this quality?

SLY. Top of the line quality.

BUNNY. Look like a fine quality to me.

CHELLE. Well I guess it ain't nothin' left to say since the Amen Corner done spoke. Forget my lil' record player then. I keep it to myself...

(CHELLE moves away and goes through the boxes. SLY looks at LANK and motions for him to tell CHELLE something. LANK mouths "Not yet". CHELLE is oblivious. BUNNY notices, but merely shakes her head and says nothing.)

BUNNY. Ya'll stand to make a killin' this month offa these parties. Folks been hittin' the after hours joints more since some of the vets done come back home from 'Nam.

LANK. Heard Otis Jones done come back home. Say he been talkin' to himself sometimes on the street.

CHELLE. Poor Otis.

SLY. That's why folks need a good place to get a drink and have a good time and leave that Vietnam blues back overseas.

CHELLE. Don't say it that way, Sylvester.

SLY. I'm just sayin' what it is.

CHELLE. Just don't say it that way. Make it sound like we doin' more than we are. We just trying to make a lil' money the way we know how.

LANK. Sly know that, Chelle.

SLY. We all know it, Chelle.

CHELLE. That's all. Not tryin' to mess these vets up more than they been already.

LANK. Ain't nobody messin' nobody up. We here to make people feel good. Make some extra money to keep my nephew in that Tuskegee Institute. I told Julius – he gonna be like one of them airmen. That's what he promised me.

SLY. A young colored brother from Detroit in school down there in Tuskegee...that's somethin' to make folk feel real good. I'll drink to that one myself – hell...

BUNNY. He gon' study all through the summer too?

CHELLE. Say he wanted to stay down there and work during the summer. *(beat)* I think it's a girl.

LANK. That's my nephew.

BUNNY. Just like his uncle.

LANK. Watch your mouth there, woman.

SLY. You, uh...you gon' be needin' some real money to keep him down there, ain't you?

CHELLE. With these parties...we should be alright. Keep Julius down there til' he graduate. My boy is gonna go all the way.

(SLY looks at LANK again. LANK finally nods and mouths "Be smooth". SLY adheres.)

SLY. Say there...uh...Lank...you know Sheplings bar on Twelfth Street gettin' sold?

LANK. *(feigning surprise)* That right? Old man sellin' it?

SLY. *(feigning casual)* Yeah, that's right. Movin' to the suburbs. Peanut said white folks all over town been tryin' to sell they property and move on out.

(BUNNY senses they're up to something and watches with amusement.)

LANK. Tryin' to get away from all these niggers movin' in, hunh?

BUNNY. Well where they goin'? Cuz if it's nice, I got news for 'em. Niggers gon' find it.

LANK. Niggers deserve nice stuff too. Hey Sly...how much he sellin' for?

SLY. Say he takin' bids. Folks that can come up with five grand can get in on the bid.

LANK. *(overly surprised)* Five grand? That's it? *(beat)* But what about the license? That's what run your well dry.

SLY. Say he gonna sell the license too. Bid on the table is 15 grand – license included.

LANK. *(overly excited)* License included?!? What's he playin' at?

SLY. Peanut say he talkin' straight.

LANK. Straight away? Fifteen grand? Whoo...that's somethin'!

(LANK looks at CHELLE.)

Ain't that somethin' Chelle?

CHELLE. *(nonchalantly)* I guess so...for somebody who want it. *(beat)* Not me.

LANK. Well you know, Sly...me and Chelle got that much to put in if that's what he's playin' with.

CHELLE. Oh no we don't.

LANK. Sure we do. Say Sly...we got that much from the stash Daddy left us.

SLY. Say what? Ain't that a coincidence? I was just sayin' what I was sayin' without knowin' nothin' bout that... That's funny...

(LANK looks at CHELLE. She stops rummaging through things and studies him close.)

CHELLE. What the hell's goin' on?

BUNNY. Some funny shit, fa sho...

LANK. Nothin' funny. Just thinkin' 'bout this bar Sly done brought up. That's all.

CHELLE. Sly done brought up...hunh... What you got up your sleeve?

LANK. Why you always think somethin's up my sleeve, Chelle?

CHELLE. Cuz when it come to you and Sly, it always is. *(beat)* This 8-track machine ain't just for no basement party, is it? Ya'll done bought all this stuff for some kinda scheme!

LANK. Awww, Chelle... *(beat)* Okay, loooka here... Me and Sly... We been thinkin' 'bout how it'd feel to be legit. Thinkin'...we could get us a piece of Shep's bar and start to build somethin' for ourselves. Found this stuff for a good deal – thought it'd be great for a bar!

CHELLE. So that's why you done changed all the decorations? For some bar?!

LANK. Not just some bar. A bar of our own.

CHELLE. No, Lank.

LANK. Whoa there – think about it for a sec, Chelle.

CHELLE. Nothin' to think about. I just say no.

LANK. Now hold on just a minute. It'd be somethin' to be legit. Wouldn't it, Sly?

SLY. Do better than dodgin' these pigs every second. They been cracking down on the after hours spots, y'know. Trying to catch everybody operating without a license. Get us for throwin' dice or smoking a joint – whatever they can. Dukes almost got raided couple weeks ago, but Peanut came in and told us the Big Four was round the corner. Niggers was runnin' this way and that 'fore they could shut everything down.

BUNNY. That Big Four been serious round Twelfth Street too.

SLY. When it's time to clean up the city, the ghetto be the only place they come lookin' for trash...

LANK. I'm tired a bein' treated like trash. Four pigs rollin' together to pick out niggers one by one. I can think of a whole lot more need to be cleaned up on these streets than us.

BUNNY. Wish they'd clean up them pot-holes on Grand Boulevard. Damn near flipped my car last week – whole was so wide.

SLY. They wanna clean somethin', why don't they clean up them pigs that come down here droppin' that dope off on the corner? I seen 'em talkin' to Otis a few times. I know what kinda game they playin'...

LANK. Pickin' out niggers ain't gonna do nothin' but lock away a whole lotta potential. Put us to good use, this city be full of all kinds of production. I'm tired of bein' laid off at that plant and runnin' joints outta my basement like I got somethin' to hide. Like the only way I can be somethin' is underground. I'm ready to be above ground just like them white folks. Ain't no tellin' what Detroit could be if we was all put to

good use. We could make some kinda...what's that word when things is all copesthetic and beautiful? Like perfect, damn near?

SLY. Utopia.

LANK. Utopia. Detroit could be some kinda...what's that place Malcolm went? Side by side with them other...y'know...Muhammed folks?

SLY. Mecca.

LANK. Detroit could be some kinda Mecca...that's what it could be. Colored folks moving this city forward. Get us some business of our own – make them stop treatin' us like trash to be swept away. I'm tellin' you, we get a chance to get above ground, Detroit'll be a Mecca.

BUNNY. Honey, if you can make Detroit that kinda place, I'll marry you.

LANK. You better go'on and pick out your dress then, baby.

CHELLE. And you better come on and help me finish gettin' this place ready. We need this joint jumpin' by Friday. Let them Dukes know the Poindexters are back on the spot.

BUNNY. Midnight good?

CHELLE. That's good to me.

LANK. (*to SLY – aside*) You gettin' in on that bid fa sho?

SLY. Like I told you – I'm gon' try. My number hit the other day, so I got me half. If you could pull the other half...then that'd be somethin'.

LANK. (*hushed*) Lemme talk to her.

SLY. You said it, my man.

BUNNY. See ya'll good folks later. Got to catch up with my ol' man.

LANK. Awww, don't tell me that now. You breakin' my heart baby.

BUNNY. Don't worry, honey. There's plenty of Bunny to go 'round.

(With a luxurious swirl, BUNNY heads up the stairs and out of the basement.)

SLY. I'ma go'on too. But I'll catch you at Lucky's Lank. See you soon, sweet Chelle.

CHELLE. Goodbye, Sylvester.

LANK. Later Sly.

(SLY exits up the stairs. CHELLE goes through the box. She pulls out 8-track cassettes with disapproval.)

LANK. There you go. That's that Mary Wells you been wanting.

CHELLE. *(firmly)* On .45.

LANK. You gon' like this better. Trust me.

(LANK starts to set up the 8-track player.)

LANK. Listen here, Chelle. This bid on the bar...this ain't a bad thing, y'know.

CHELLE. No, Lank.

LANK. Now just hear me out, will you? I got enough friends over here to make this spot happenin'. We won't be wall to wall up in here. Got space for more folks. Won't be competing with them Dukes no more. Our own spot – that'd be somethin'.

CHELLE. That ain't the somethin' I want, Lank. Put Mama and Daddy's hard-earned money on the line just to keep hustlin'? 'Cuz that's all a bar is. A hustle on-the-books.

LANK. That's all any kinda business is.

CHELLE. I don't wanna be hustlin' forever.

LANK. What you wanna do, Chelle? Sit on the money 'til we rot?

CHELLE. I just wanna have somewhere for Julius to return and call home. These parties are temporary. Survivin'. This house and this life is all I need. I don't wanna take on nothin' that could make us lose it.

LANK. Don't you see I'm tryin' to make things better? Invest this money so it grow into somethin' more. For you and Julius. Be the man for him that his Daddy woulda been – was he alive.

CHELLE. I know, Lank. You been a good fill-in for my Willie and I love you for it. But I don't love no bar. I don't wanna lose my son's future to no bar. Too shaky. I want him to have something solid.

LANK. Me too.

CHELLE. Then promise me you won't blow our money on this deal.

LANK. Come on, Chelle.

CHELLE. Promise me we gonna hold this house and this family together. Promise me that, Lank

LANK. Alright, Chelle. Never mind the bar.

(beat)

CHELLE. I'm gon' go up to the corner store and get us some liquor for the shelf. Where the keys?

LANK. Upstairs on the counter.

CHELLE. Be back in a few. *(beat)* I'm gon' see 'bout this Mary Wells when I get back. Bet it ain't better than my .45.

(CHELLE heads up the basement stairs. LANK, alone, goes to his 8-track player and plugs it in.)

(He picks up a cassette and smiles.)

LANK. *(to the cassette)* We'll show her, Mary...

(Mary Wells, "WHAT'S EASY FOR TWO IS SO HARD FOR ONE" plays.)

(Lights fade on LANK and his 8-track.)

Scene Two.

(Night falls on the house. The basement is dark and still. Suddenly, the door cracks open. A peek of moonlight from the balcony.)

(Shuffled footsteps come down the steps...followed by muffled voices.)

SLY. Where to? Not there – **LANK.** Over here. Right
wait – to the left some there – okay – hold on
– on my foot now – – what's that – whose
gotdamnit-nigger, my foot is that? – move
foot! over more!

LANK. Put her on the couch.

(LANK and SLY carry a large covered figure over to the couch and plop it down.)

(LANK goes over to the light and flicks on a lamp.)

(SLY stands over the unknown figure and stares.)

SLY. She's still out.

LANK. Check her pulse?

SLY. Don't need to. She's breathing. I can see that much.
She's breathing.

LANK. Thank God.

(LANK walks over to the concealed figure and pulls back her cover. For the first time, we see CAROLINE, a young white woman, who lies motionless.)

SLY. Say Lank, I'm gonna need a joint for this one.

LANK. You know Chelle don't like smoking in the house.

SLY. I think I'm'a need a pass on this one.

LANK. How 'bout a drink instead? Some gin in the cabinet.

SLY. I'm already over my limit...but...what the hell...

(SLY goes to the bar and fixes himself a drink.)

LANK. She bleeding anywhere?

SLY. Don't think so.

LANK. Gotta make sure.

(LANK moves around CAROLINE carefully. He touches her lightly. She stays motionless.)

(SLY gulps his drink.)

SLY. She knocked out cold.

LANK. You said it.

SLY. Maybe she might need some kinda ice pack or somethin' for her head. Right there in the corner. Look like some dried blood.

LANK. Yeah...yeah... I think we got that...

(LANK goes over to the freezer and pulls out a box of frozen veggies. He brings it back and starts to set it on CAROLINE's forehead.)

SLY. Whoa – hold on there. You might wanna cover it with somethin' first. She get freezer burn or somethin'. Have a pack of vegetables stuck to her face.

LANK. Wouldn't want that...

SLY. There go a towel over there.

(SLY points to the sink basin.)

LANK. Right.

(LANK rushes over to get the towel. He wraps the veggies and comes back over to CAROLINE. He sets it on her face. She flinches but doesn't awaken.)

LANK. It's alright, miss. It's okay...

(LANK lifts the box.)

LANK. Maybe I should leave her be.

SLY. Maybe. *(beat)* What you gon' tell Chelle?

LANK. The truth. Ain't nothin' else to tell her.

SLY. The truth? Hell...I'd like to know the truth myself. Truth ain't comin' 'til that woman wake back up.

LANK. I pray to God she wake back up.

SLY. We must be two of the craziest niggers in Detroit right now – get ourselves involved in this mess.

LANK. Mess found us. What else could we do?

SLY. I go listenin' to you...that's my problem. Shoulda left her out there and kept rollin'.

LANK. You listenin' to me? I couldn't tell.

SLY. Yeah nigger, I'm listenin' to you. You the one think you some kinda Negro Messiah. Every time I turn around, you tryin' to part some seas or walk on water or some shit. How I get into it – where I fit in this mess – I don't know. How I let you make me bring this white girl back here, I don't know! I must be drunker than I thought.

LANK. Awww man, I ain't make you do nothin'. A man can't make no other man do nothin' – he a real man. You got hands and feet, ain't you? Drove the truck here, ain't you? You in this just as much as me.

SLY. How am I in this as much as you? I ain't the one grab her!

LANK. No – you the one sat there 'til somebody tell you what to do.

SLY. Tell me what to do?! I got feet and hands ain't I?

LANK. I ain't so sure.

SLY. Ain't nobody tell me what to do. *I* tell me what to do.

LANK. Well okay then, you said it.

SLY. Say what?

LANK. You did this cuz of you. Not cuz of me. Just like you said.

(beat)

SLY. Nigger don't be tryin' to slick talk me when I been drinkin'!

(A door creak at the top of the stairs. CHELLE enters the balcony...sleepily.)

CHELLE. Lank? Sly? Y'all alright down there? I heard ya'll comin' in...woke me up...

LANK. We alright Chelle. Go'on back to bed. We alright.

(CHELLE catches a glance at the couch. She sees someone sprawled out over it.)

CHELLE. Who's that...what's goin' on down there? Can't none of y'all drunk friends sleep here tonight...

LANK. It's nothin' Chelle – go'on back to bed now.

(CHELLE peers more over the balcony. She comes down the steps.)

CHELLE. Lank – I don't want none of your women over here tonight neither. We done talked about this –

(CHELLE stops. Sees CAROLINE – passed out.)

What the hell?

LANK. Chelle, relax now.

CHELLE. Relax – my ass!

SLY. Hold on a minute, Chelle.

CHELLE. Hold on – nothin'!

LANK. Gimme a chance to explain.

CHELLE. You better start explaining real good. What the hell is this white girl doin' down here? You done went stupid?

LANK. Hold on Chelle! It's not what you thinkin' –

CHELLE. Well tell me what it is then! Cuz I'm thinkin' you and Sly done lost y'all everlasting minds! Bringing this girl at this hour –

SLY. We got a reason for that, Chelle.

CHELLE. I ain't hearin' no reasons! Somebody better tell me what's what.

LANK. We found her, Chelle.

CHELLE. Found her how? Where was you lookin' for her at?

SLY. Wasn't lookin' for her. Just found her when we was leavin' Lucky's Place. Stumbling on the side of the road and lookin' real bad.

CHELLE. What make you pick her up and bring her here?!

LANK. She been hurt up. Somebody done hurt her up good.

(CHELLE goes over to CAROLINE quickly. She pulls back the covers and sees even more bruises along CAROLINE's face. Swollen eye. Dried blood by her temple. Greens and yellows staining her face.)

CHELLE. *(gasps)* Good Lord. She look terrible.

SLY. Did a good number on her, whoever they is.

CHELLE. *(leaning to CAROLINE's chest)* She breathing. Thank God. *(beat)* Y'all didn't...y'all ain't messed with her –

LANK. Come on, Chelle.

CHELLE. Just have to ask. *(beat)* What happened to her?

LANK. Caught a glimpse of her when we was leaving Lucky's. Stumbling 'round on Chicago Boulevard. Lookin' like she might fall right into traffic.

CHELLE. Lord...she probably done got robbed. What was she doin' on Chicago?

SLY. Thought maybe she was drunk and done forgot where she was. I seen that a few times.

LANK. Slowed down to ask if she was okay. That's when we saw her up close. Lookin' in bad way and not really all there. Mumbling somethin' to herself. Not really makin' a lot of sense. I leaned out to ask her if she needed a ride and that's when she looked at me... dead in my eye – in this way like...like she knew exactly where was she was for a second. Like she heard me for the first time. And she said "get me outta here." Real serious – like that. Dead in my eye. Then she got faint, like she was gonna drop right where she stood. I jump out to grab hold of her...helped her into the truck to drop her off somewhere, and she just pass right out. Couldn't get her back up.

SLY. So this...this nigger say –

LANK. Say to Sly, we better bring her back here. We leave her down there, whoever done this may be comin' back to finish the job.

CHELLE. Her face – sweet Jesus. It look like it's been somebody's punching bag.

LANK. Way she looked at me...dead in my eye like that...
(*beat*) I dunno...just messed with me...had to do somethin'.

CHELLE. You get her some ice?

SLY. Took a pack of vegetables in the freezer.

CHELLE. She gonna need some ointment for this gash. Sly run up in the bathroom and get me some ointment out the cabinet.

SLY. Whatever you say.

(*SLY wobbles upstairs.*)

CHELLE. So where we gonna take her?

LANK. Ain't nowhere to take her. Just figure we let her stay here tonight. Figure the rest out when she wake up.

CHELLE. We can't keep her here.

LANK. What else you wanna do, Chelle? Leave her in a alley?

CHELLE. I ain't sayin' that, but she can't stay here!

LANK. What's it gonna hurt – one night?

CHELLE. What you think gonna happen when this white girl wake up in a house full of colored folks in the ghetto? You think she gonna be thankful and happy you saved her when she see all these gashes on her face? You think she gonna be able to distinguish one colored fool from the next?

LANK. How you know it was a colored fool?

CHELLE. I pray it wasn't. But if it was...we all in trouble. Even if it wasn't...all she got to do is say it was, and we all in trouble.

LANK. I know that, Chelle. Don't you think I know that?

CHELLE. If you know that then why is she still layin' on this couch? Let's get Sly, and go drop her down off at the hospital.

LANK. They takin' names down at the hospital. 'Less we just dump her at the door and keep rollin', they gonna have our names. See our faces. They wanna pin somethin' on two colored men, they just got the names and faces.

CHELLE. Then drop her off and let's keep rollin'.

LANK. Chelle! I ain't gonna do that, now. Have some kinda heart.

CHELLE. I got a heart! I got a mind and a gut too. And they all throwin' up caution signs every which-a-way.

LANK. I say she can stay here through the night, Chelle. We can do that much.

(SLY re-enters with the ointment.)

SLY. Found some ointment. Some bandages and tape too.

(He hands them to CHELLE. She begins applying it to CAROLINE and bandaging her up.)

SLY. So where we gonna take her?

LANK. She stayin' here for the night.

SLY. That right?

CHELLE. That's what Lank say.

LANK. She stay 'til the morning, and we help her get on her way.

SLY. That's what you say, then that's what it is.

(SLY heads to the stairs.)

SLY. I'm'a go' on home then. Catch you when the sun come up...

(SLY stumbles on the stairs. LANK hurries over and helps him.)

LANK. Gimme them keys, man. I got the wheels.

(CHELLE continues to bandage CAROLINE...carefully. Meticulously.)

LANK. Be right back, Chelle. You got this?

CHELLE. I guess I do, don't I?

(LANK helps SLY up the stairs. They disappear behind the door.)

(CHELLE finishes bandaging CAROLINE. She stands and studies her quietly for a moment.)

(She grabs a pillow and props CAROLINE's feet up. Then she covers her back up, heads to the stairs... Looks back with reluctance...)

(Shaking her head, she goes up the stairs.)

CHELLE. *(softly aloud)* Good Lord, don't let it be no niggers...

(She hits the light and disappears behind the door.)

Scene Three

(Daylight. Sun spills through the small windows. CAROLINE lies sleeping on the couch.)

(She turns once. Then again. Then violently. Finally, she jerks out of her sleep.)

(beat)

(CAROLINE looks around at her surroundings. Slowly, she rises from the couch. Surveys the basement. Past the walls. Sees the pics of Motown artists. Muhammad Ali. Joe Louis. Malcolm X. The four-pointed star on the wall. A black fist. The self-portrait of the lumpy looking brown girl.)

(She freezes. Slightly bewildered. Slightly intrigued.)

(She passes a mirror on the wall. Looks at her reflection and gasps!)

(She studies herself in horror. Lifts her bandages. Her bruised eye. Her swollen jaw. She touches her face gently...pressing at the pain and wincing.)

(The door at the top of the stairs opens and LANK emerges. CAROLINE halts.)

LANK. Hey there, Miss. I guess you're up now, hunh?

CAROLINE. Who are you?

LANK. I'm Lank. Brought you some breakfast. My sister made it, not me. Some eggs and toast. She can burn... my sister can...

CAROLINE. Lank?

LANK. That's right. This is our house. Me and my buddy Sly...we picked you up last night...standing out there off Chicago Boulevard...

CAROLINE. *(sobering)* Oh. Fuck. Right.

(LANK sets down the tray.)

LANK. We didn't do nothin'...just found you stumblin' 'round and brought you back 'cuz...you was hurtin'. You was needin' some help, remember?

CAROLINE. Yeah... Yeah, thanks, um...shit.

LANK. I can call somebody for you. Call you a cab or drop you somewhere. If you just tell me where I can take you...

CAROLINE. No! – Uh, thanks but...no...thanks. *(shift)*
Where am I?

LANK. You over here on the west side. Twelfth Street and Clairmount. You ever been over these parts before?

CAROLINE. Twelfth Street. Sometimes. *(quickly fixing)* Not really though. Not much. But yeah – no.

(He offers the toast again.)

LANK. Some food. That's what you need. Somethin' on your stomach.

(CAROLINE looks at the food. At LANK.)

LANK. Go on.

(CAROLINE politely pinches a piece of toast and nibbles.)

CAROLINE. Good jam.

LANK. My sister makes it from scratch. Jars it.

CAROLINE. She's good.

LANK. She knows it too.

(CAROLINE laughs faintly.)

She ran out to the bank. She'll be back in a few. Maybe she can get you some of her clothes to put on. Help you get cleaned up some. You got some family? Somebody I can call for you?

(CAROLINE stops nibbling.)

CAROLINE. No, I'm alright. That's okay. *(shift)* I should... um...I should give you something for your help and everything... *(She looks around herself.)* I'm just gonna get my um...my purse?

LANK. Purse?

CAROLINE. It's gone? My purse.

LANK. I didn't see you with no purse, ma'am. Sorry.

CAROLINE. (*panic*) Shit! Motherfucker!

LANK. Whoa – Miss...if it's some money you need – some fare or somethin', my sister and me – we can help with that.

CAROLINE. Yeah?

LANK. Yeah, if you needin' somethin'...

CAROLINE. Yeah... (*then quickly*) No, uh...Mr...

LANK. Lank, remember. Name's Langston...but folks 'round here call me Lank.

CAROLINE. Riiight Langston. Yeah, okay, um...thank you for the food and for your help.

LANK. You gonna be okay?

CAROLINE. The bathroom. I need the bathroom.

LANK. 'Course. There's one in that washroom right there. Got some towels in there too, you need one.

CAROLINE. Great, thanks.

(CAROLINE exits. LANK watches after her for a moment.)

(The door to the basement opens. CHELLE comes down the stairs.)

CHELLE. She woke up yet?

LANK. In the next room washin' up.

CHELLE. She tell you anything? Who she is? What done happened?

LANK. Ain't said much yet. Just gettin' her bearings. Don't think she has nobody, Chelle.

CHELLE. What you mean? She didn't give you no people to call?

LANK. Say ain't nobody to call. I think she in trouble.

CHELLE. Oh Lord...that mean we in trouble with her. You ain't get her to tell you nothin'?

LANK. She worried about somethin'. Ain't sure what. Or who. But that trouble from last night ain't over. That's all I know.

CHELLE. I don't want that trouble followin' her here, Lank.
We gotta find out who her people are and get her back to them. That's what we gotta do.

(CAROLINE re-enters looking mildly cleaned up. Her face is cleaner. Her hair a bit tidier. She stops when she sees CHELLE.)

CAROLINE. Thank you folks for your help and the good jam...

CHELLE. No problem, miss. My brother Langston is gonna take you to the hospital to make sure you're okay.

CAROLINE. Oh no...that – thank you – that won't be necessary...

CHELLE. Well where can we take you, honey? You got a sister or some friends somewhere? Somebody wondering where you are?

CAROLINE. No I...I'll just...I'll be fine...

CHELLE. You sure, miss?

CAROLINE. *(no)* Of course...I just...I'll just be out of your hair now... But thank you again for all your trouble...

(CAROLINE walks over to the stairs. Then stops suddenly.)

Say listen, you wouldn't have – or know where – I could rent a room...work for my board...for a few days or so?

(LANK and CHELLE look at each other.)

LANK. You need some room and board?

CAROLINE. Just...I don't have anything...my purse is gone, you know...

CHELLE. We could pull together a few bucks for you, miss –

LANK. I told her that –

CAROLINE. I just need somewhere to room for a week or so...just until I can leave. Pay for train fare –

CHELLE. There's Algiers Motel not far –

LANK. Won't let you stay on credit.

CAROLINE. I won't be trouble. I'd work for it. Doesn't matter where. As long as it's safe.

LANK. You can stay here, miss –

CHELLE. Lank –

LANK. If you need to.

CAROLINE. I would work –

CHELLE. We don't have no work –

LANK. We got us a bar needin' some upkeep. Doing some renovations around here. Maybe you could help with that –

CHELLE. And what we gonna pay her?

LANK. Tips.

CAROLINE. I know how to work a bar. I could do that.

CHELLE. Work for us?

LANK. Why not? My sister been needing some hands on that bar. But just so you clear, miss – it ain't during regular hours.

CHELLE. Lank!

CAROLINE. Oh that's alright with me. I'm used to a lot of irregular.

LANK. Good then. It's a deal. You help us out...you stay right here on this couch. Folds out into a bed if you like. You stay here 'til you got enough to pay for that train fare.

CHELLE. A week. That's all it take. No longer.

CAROLINE. A week – yes. That's great. That'll do.

(Beat. CHELLE silently fumes. LANK extends his hand to CAROLINE.)

LANK. Welcome to the Poindexter house, Miss...Miss?

CAROLINE. Caroline.

LANK. Caroline. Welcome. We good people here. Hard workin', hustlin' people. You gonna be just fine. That's my sister, Michelle.

(CAROLINE nods. CHELLE remains stern.)

LANK. *(cont.)* She's gonna take you upstairs – get you some clean clothes to put on.

CAROLINE. You don't have to –

LANK. It's fine. Ain't that fine, Chelle?

CHELLE. Oh yeah, it's fine alright. *(beat)* Go'on up them stairs. To the right, down the hall. I'm right behind you. Gonna pull some laundry for you.

(CAROLINE moves up the stairs.)

CAROLINE. Thank you both. Really. You're good folks.

(CAROLINE slowly disappears behind the door.)

CHELLE. You done went plain stupid.

LANK. What I tell you? She in trouble, Chelle.

CHELLE. You damn right she in trouble! Can't figure out whether she comin' or goin'. Lookin' like a wild animal that done went astray.

LANK. You ain't see her like I seen her. Standin' on the side of that road – lookin' me in my eye like the devil himself come to claim her. I just can't send her back out there just yet. Can't have that on my soul... She just need a little help, is all. A little help and a little time.

CHELLE. A week, Lank. And her time run out. You hear me?

LANK. A week, Chelle.

CHELLE. And this one Lank...she ain't for touch. You understand?

LANK. Come on now, Chelle. That's not what this is about. I'm just being friendly. That's all.

CHELLE. I know you, boy. I know your kinda friendly. And I say – keep your friendliness to yourself...or this gonna be a short week.

LANK. Go'on help her get into somethin' clean, Chelle. Help her out, will you?

(CHELLE eyes LANK firmly. Then she turns, grabs some clothes from the line, and heads up the stairs.)

CHELLE. (*muttering*) Done invited a white girl to the joint... tonight's gonna be some kinda party...

(*The door closes.*)

(**LANK** remains...contemplative for a moment. He looks at the tray of half-eaten food. He lifts it, and carries it up the stairs.)

(*lights fade...*)

Scene Four

(“DANCING IN THE STREET” by Martha and the Vandellas plays.)

(Lights up on the basement – in full pre-party mode. CHELLE moves quickly about the space, filling bowls of nuts and setting out napkins. LANK stacks up songs by the 8-track player – which lights up as the song plays.)

(BUNNY sits on a stool and rocks to the music.)

BUNNY. This is my jam! Oooo Lank, baby – this 8-track player is sounding real good!

LANK. Didn't I tell you, woman?

(CHELLE looks at an empty bowl.)

CHELLE. Who ate the nuts that quick?

(BUNNY points at LANK as he devours a batch of nuts in his hand.)

CHELLE. Lank! That ain't for you! You eatin' 'em all up before the guests even get here.

LANK. What? I'm testin' 'em out!

CHELLE. *(yelling)* Caroline! We gonna need some more of those cashews! And you finish mixing that punch?

CAROLINE. *(offstage)* Almost!

BUNNY. This some shit I just can't believe.

CHELLE. Don't even mention it, Bunny.

BUNNY. Y'all got a white girl over here in the ghetto runnin' 'round under y'all like some kinda maid? This some shit'll make ya mama and daddy raise right back out they graves. Everybody gonna wanna see some of this.

LANK. Not a maid, Bunny. She's just helpin' us out. That's all.

BUNNY. What you know about her? Who's her people?

CHELLE. Ain't said. She been keepin' real quiet and polite all day. Too polite.

LANK. She still a little shook up, that's all. Just trying to get on her feet.

BUNNY. Well whatever she doin' – it's enough to have this place packed tonight. Word done got out quick. Folks can't wait to get served by a white girl over here! White girls can get the joint jumpin' every time. You even mention some kinda blue eyes and niggers will stop what they doin' to get close enough to have a gaze. Swear it – white girl is a natural aphrodisiac.

CHELLE. Hush, Bunny.

BUNNY. You'll see what I mean.

(The basement door opens. SLY enters with a bag of liquor. He is dressed to the nines – party suit and all.)

SLY. Heard there was a happenin' party this way tonight!

(LANK peers inside of SLY's bag.)

LANK. You brought some sip? What's the word?

SLY. Thunderbird.

LANK. What's the price?

SLY. Thirty twice.

LANK. My maaan...

(LANK slides sixty cents to SLY.)

BUNNY. Look at you, Sly... You done bought some new threads.

SLY. Told y'all my number hit.

BUNNY. How you the numbers man and your number hit? What kinda gamblin' rig is that? That sound like some jive if I ever heard it.

SLY. I don't cheat, now. Just 'cuz I run around collectin' bids don't mean I can't bid too. I ain't no psychic. Can't tell which number'll hit. Everybody know I'm true – black not blue. I came lookin' my best for you tonight, Chelle.

CHELLE. Go'on somewhere, Sly.

SLY. Don't be mean, woman. I came all past the pigs flashin' their lights in my face just to be up in your fine fine place.

BUNNY. They came messin' with you?

SLY. Stopped me over there on La Salle. Askin' my plans for the night. Like I need some kinda pass to walk the streets that say – No Mr. Pig, I ain't goin' to get high or drunk without makin' sho the fine city of Detroit get to tax it for they profit.

LANK. They follow you?

SLY. Told 'em I was on my way home from Lucky's. Soon as they fixed to get in my face, radio went off. Heard somethin' bout a tussle near the freeway and they took off. But not before they told me to make sure my nigger ass went home and didn't come back out.

CHELLE. Listen to how they talk.

BUNNY. Boys in blue.

SLY. Talkin' ain't the half of it. 'Specially 'round this way. Sniffin' out these joints and bustin' nigger ass like it give 'em a special kinda high. Like it's recreation, damn near.

BUNNY. Tried to grab me up last night leavin' my ol' man's. Say women like me up to no good. I know what they meanin'. But honey, if I was a streetwalker it wouldn't be over here on no La Salle. Pig wouldn't be able to afford my kinda price.

CHELLE. You ain't sass him, did you?

BUNNY. Honey, naw. Way they been swingin' them clubs lately...ain't no kinda chivalry in them ass whoopins. Men. Women. Don't seem to matter.

LANK. Well I ain't standin' round waitin' to get my ass busted. I tell you that much. Ain't so long you can hit folks 'fore they start to hit back.

CHELLE. Hush that kinda talk, Lank. We just got to make sure folks keep a low profile coming over here and mind themselves. Don't want none of y'all getting in no trouble on account of us trying to have a good time.

SLY. Don't worry. Won't be nobody else in threads this fine. That's how come they pulled my card. Said – that

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