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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Diary of Lights: New York About 1955

by Adrienne Kennedy

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-70397-3

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CHARACTERS

BILLIE – comic, sweet and ultimately very serious; has on a V neck sweater and khakis

EDDIE – very serious; Macy-type cotton dress white wedgies

AARON – seersucker jacket and trousers

MARGO – very intellectual and bohemian; Mexican wedding shirt, very long straight hair smokes cigars wears sandals

MAVIS – very pretty; white dress and red stole very wavy black hair piled on top of her head in curls

ROY – frank; seersucker suit

ELLEN BOYFRIEND – very well read

AISHA MOHAMMED – shy

PLACES

The Thalia

Upper Broadway

Bancroft Hall, Columbia University

Macdougal Street

Rienzi's Coffee House

Washington Square Park

Metropole

Palladium

Birdland

AUTHOR'S NOTES

All are dynamic and alive and you wish you were with them that night. Margo Aaron and Mel are white. Aisha and Mohammed are from Cairo, Egypt.

Each scene is set by larger than life lights that are the replica of the real life lights of New York Places.

Most often the colors are yellows, pink, oranges, whites, reds and purple.

The dialogue is collective and almost a song.

Their whole youthful summer is a dance and the dances all reflect this.

All the lights glitter with a life of their own.

Scene One: Night

Lights: Thalia

(The stage is bare; above are Thalia lights. Lights are high and glitter like stars. **EDDIE** *and* **BILLIE**, *a young married "Negro" couple.* **AARON** *and* **MARGO**, *a young Jewish couple emerge from Thalia. Thalia music, movie music. The four go into a dance; As they finish the dance, they start to talk to each other. They talk collectively as in a chorus with great exhilaration, and they are in front of the theatre.)*

ALL. Everyone's reading *Catcher in the Rye.*

BILLIE. I read it and now I'm reading *Crime and Punishment.*

I love literature.

I really do.

I feel so alive when I'm reading.

No Negro women have ever had a play on Broadway and only two Negro men, Langston Hughes and Louis Peterson.

I read *Theatre Arts* every month.

MARGO. *(Jewish poetess or would like to be)* I love Gérard Philipe.

BILLIE. I wish I looked like Dorothy Dandridge.

MARGO. I love Gérard Philipe.

EDDIE & BILLIE. We saw William Marshall in *Othello.*

BILLIE. Everyone says Eddie and I are an ideal couple. Aaron and Margo are so bohemian.

EDDIE & BILLIE. We saw William Marshall in *Othello.* It was so wonderful and we met him backstage. And we went to a tavern in Carnegie Hall. It was so exciting.

BILLIE. William Marshall signed a napkin for me. It said to Billie from William Marshall. He's the handsomest man I've ever seen. And he knows a lot of people in Hollywood. He knows Kim Novak.

AARON. I want to write poems like Saint-John Perse and essays like James Agee.

AARON & MARGO. We're reading the Russians this summer, Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoyevsky.

AARON. I'm reading Walter Pater and Santayana. *(to* **EDDIE***)* There's a great showing of Picasso's work coming to the Museum of Modern Art. We all must go.

MARGO. Wasn't that a marvellous movie. I love Gérard Philipe.

AARON. My favorite book is *Thus Spake Zarathustra.*

MARGO. Wasn't that a marvellous movie.

BILLIE. *(sometimes to* **EDDIE***, sometimes to* **AARON** *and* **MARGO***, but mostly to herself)*

(They start to go into dance.)

Books are so comforting. I'm reading *Madame Bovary.* Flaubert really understands. I cried when Emma Bovary poisoned herself.

If I were famous like Gwendolyn Brooks I wouldn't feel inferior to anyone. I'm going to go right home and write in my diary.

EDDIE & BILLIE. Let's go back to our apartment. Roy and Mavis and Aisha and Mohammed are coming.

(dance)

MARGO. I love Gérard Philipe.

ALL. On a night like this New York is full of possibilities the possibilities of being a part of a history of people who've achieved and set the world on fire.

BILLIE. I'm going home right home and write in my diary.

ALL. On a night like this the lights are like stars.

(starting to walk away from **THALIA** *and exiting stage all except* **BILLIE,** *who stands staring at the marquee)*

BILLIE. I love New York.

(Of all the characters, the lights have the strongest power over **BILLIE**.*)*

(movie music)

BILLIE. *(lost in thought; staring up at marquee)* I went to a Poetry class this spring at the New School. The instructor told me I had a gift. I can't tell anyone in the whole world how happy that made me. The instructor was a woman who taught at Long Island University and worked with Chapel Hill Press. She was a real writer. She sent six of my poems to the Press but they were sent back. The editor said they were too fragmented.

I was depressed about that.

I love to go out with Margo and Aaron. Aaron was in Korea with Eddie and it just happened they landed back here at Columbia at the same time.

(hear them calling her)

Margo smokes cigars and drinks something I've never heard of called Calvados. She says Hemingway drinks it.

Her mother works for *Time*. She also drinks Pernod, Chartreuse and wines but only wines from certain years.

And Aaron he's reading the life of Van Gogh. Aaron is crazy about Van Gogh. One time we all went to the Modern together and he showed us every Van Gogh.

He has a huge book of Van Gogh prints and says there's nobody like Vincent.

He told me about Van Gogh cutting off his ear.

He loves the French Impressionists.

And he has an analyst.

So does Margo.

They share their psychiatrist.

(They call Billie, Billie.)

BILLIE. *(cont.)* All of Eddie's money from his part time job and mine go to Columbia. Eddie has been self-supporting since he was sixteen. Eddie is of course on the G.I. Bill since he was in the army.

He doesn't seem like the same person since he came back from Korea. I'm sorry we got engaged before he went to Korea. I was twenty-one.

I feel so young. And now I'm pregnant again.

When I lost the baby he was thousands of miles away. All that bleeding and I was alone. The Red Cross let him send me a telegram.

I can't believe we used to be so in love on the campus and park the car and kiss and kiss. Yet I was a virgin when we married a virgin who was to bleed and bleed…

When I was in the hospital all I had was a photograph of Eddie in G.I. clothes standing in some woods.

(Pause.)

My father used to say John Hope Franklin Du Bois and Benjamin Mays were fine men. Cleveland is a place for opportunity he said, a chance to come out of the back woods of Georgia.

Aristotle was not his hero Jesus was.

(Pause.)

No one knows I'm pregnant except Eddie. I don't want anyone to know. *(She runs off.)*

(All gets dark except the very glittering lights of the Thalia. Movie music.)

Scene Two: Broadway

Lights: Broadway 116th

(Dance. Going home down Upper Broadway. **AARON**, **MARGO**, **BILLIE**, **EDDIE**. *Coming home from the movies on a summer night.)*

Scene Three: Bancroft Hall

Lights: Columbia University

*(***EDDIE** *and* **BILLIE, AARON** *and* **MARGO,** *Eddie's brother* **ROY** *and his girlfriend* **MAVIS, AISHA** *and* **MOHAMMED,** *an Egyptian couple. They are listening to Lead Belly and Segovia music and drinking wine. The music is loud. The Lights of Columbia blaze from the window. Darkness:* **MARGO** *enters. Lights come up: The colors are more maroon, pink.)*

MARGO. I've brought Calvados. Hemingway drinks it.

*(***BILLIE** *emerges with candles which she starts to put around. Her hair is straightened in lots of little curls. She should give the impression of just having on lipstick.)*

MARGO. I'll put on Segovia. *(She goes off.)*

(Segovia type music comes up loud, then down; **BILLIE** *puts candles on the only prop, a round table.* **MARGO** *goes to the window, smoking her cigar.)*

BILLIE. *(putting glasses candles and wine on small table)* Eddie's brother Roy's coming. I have a feeling this is going to be a "course" evening. Roy and Eddie talk about three things, their childhood, the racial situation and their courses. You see Roy is very original in his thinking and can direct plays. I think if he were white he would have a chance to be like someone like Kazan or Orson Welles. I saw a play he directed at Brooklyn College and it was so exciting. Roy says they haven't let in a black director yet in the New York theatre.

Roy took us to see *In Splendid Error* and he knows Louis Peterson who wrote *Take a Giant Step.*

I have a bulletin from the New School. I'm taking a course in writing this summer. It costs thirty dollars. And I'm reading *Invisible Man.* When Ralph Ellison speaks at the YMHA next fall I'm going to hear him.

I'd like to be a great writer.

*(***EDDIE**, **AARON**, **ROY**, *and* **MAVIS** *enter with great exhilaration.)*

MARGO. Have some Calvados.

EDDIE. I bought some Chianti.

*(***ROY**, **BILLIE**, *and* **EDDIE** *go off.)*

MARGO. *(to* **MAVIS***)* I'm Margo. I'm a poetess. My mother works for *Time* magazine. My father works for *Newsweek*.

AARON. *(to* **MAVIS***)* We live in the village. I'm Aaron.

MAVIS. I work for *Ebony*.

MARGO. Yes we live in the Village on Christopher Street Where do you live?

MAVIS. In Brooklyn.

AARON & MARGO. *(astonished)* Brooklyn? You should move to the Village.

(They start to drink.)

*(***ROY**, **BILLIE**, *and* **EDDIE** *re-enter.)*

AARON & MARGO. Hello. *(to* **ROY***)* We're Margo and Aaron. We live in the Village. We live together and we're not married.

ROY. I teach at Brooklyn College.

(all at once:)

BILLIE. I love Gwendolyn Brooks. *Maud Martha* is the best book I've ever read about being a Negro girl.

EDDIE. I like Ray Robinson and Thurgood Marshall.

(all at once:)

MARGO. I love Marlon Brando and Dostoyevsky. One day I want to write a book like *The Brothers Karamazov*. I wish Aaron and I lived on an island. I know we'd have great thoughts if we only lived on an island.

If I could write a novel like Bonjour Tristesse then I would be rich and do anything I wanted. Then I could meet Marlon Brando. I've seen On the Waterfront three times.

MAVIS. Let's go to Birdland and see Count Basie and Joe Williams.

MARGO. I'm beginning to feel depressed about being pregnant. I bet Elizabeth Taylor leads an exciting life. I wish I could meet Marlon Brando. I wonder if Aaron and I went to Mexico could we lead a life like Emiliano Zapata.

BILLIE. I'd like to write poems like in *Maud Martha*.

MAVIS. Let's go to Birdland.

AARON. I tried getting out of the army several times by pretending I was crazy.

(Very often **EDDIE** *tries to talk to* **BILLIE** *but she moves away.)*

AARON & MARGO. Our analyst says…

MAVIS. Roy and I went to the Copa and saw Sammy Davis. And we went back to his dressing room and talked to him afterward. It was so exciting.

*(***ROY** *is cool to* **MARGO** *and* **AARON**.*)*

MARGO. I met Thomas Mann in Vermont once when I was little. I write poems. My mother is mentioned in a famous book about Greenwich Village in the thirties.

AARON & MARGO. Our analyst says…

MARGO. I'd like to be like Isadora Duncan…this summer I'm going to make dresses from Batik and wrap my hair in braids around my head. Isadora was a real rebel and she knew everything about literature painting sex philosophy. And sex especially sex.

MAVIS. This weekend we're going to Birdland to hear Sarah Vaughan. Last winter we saw Dinah Washington.

AARON. *(to* **EDDIE***)* Eddie you're stable…goals aims I wish I knew what I wanted to do with my life.

*(***AISHA** *and* **MOHAMMED** *enter.)*

EDDIE & BILLIE. These are our neighbors from Egypt.

(Everyone says hello. **AISHA** *and* **MOHAMMED** *are very shy.)*

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