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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

Acting Edition

The Glorious World of Crowns, Kinks and Curls

by Keli Goff

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-70948-7

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THE GLORIOUS WORLD OF CROWNS, KINKS AND CURLS was first produced by the Baltimore Center Stage, streaming from March 25th to May 2nd, 2021. The performance was directed by Bianca LaVerne Jones, with scenic and costume design by Dede Ayite, hair and wig design by Nikiya Mathis, lighting design by Stacey Derosier, and sound design by Twi McCallum. The Stage Manager was Danielle Teague-Daniels. The cast was as follows:

LADY 1 . . . . . Stori Ayers
LADY 2 . . . . . Awa Sal Secka
LADY 3 . . . . . Shayna Small

CHARACTERS

LADY 1 – A Black woman

LADY 2 – A Black woman

LADY 3 – A Black woman

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In the tradition of *For Colored Girls*...and *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Glorious World of Crowns, Kinks and Curls* is a collection of monologues, scenes and poetry, featuring voices of Black women from around the globe recalling unforgettable moments in their lives in which their hair – and their complicated relationships with their hair – took center stage. From afros to braids, and weddings to funerals, *The Glorious World of Crowns, Kinks and Curls,* will take audiences on an intimate and unparalleled journey into the world of Black womanhood.

While ideally at least one of the **LADIES** should identify as curvy, please note that each cast member, regardless of her actual appearance, will play a multitude of women and girls of different ages, skin tones and hair textures, representing a diverse spectrum of Black women. Please also note that the ladies of the cast can play whichever characters make the most sense for that particular production at that particular time, except in those instances in which a **LADY**'s number is specified for continuity and clarity.

(As audience members enter the theater, they hear the following audio on an ongoing loop, until lights come up. ***This audio marks the official start of the play and is an essential part of establishing the setting.*** *[The audio can either be prerecorded or can be recreated by cast members offstage using microphones or just their voices.] The audio, in no particular order, includes:*

- *Sounds of blow dryers which can be heard blowing for a bit, followed by...*

- *A woman's voice saying: "that's too hot..."*

- *And another replying: "Do you want it dry or not? You said you didn't have time to sit under."*

- *A "sizzling" sound – to signify a hot pressing comb, followed by...*

- *A woman's voice shouting: "Ow! You burned me!"*

- *And another replying: "I wouldn't have if you would sit still! I'm trying to get your edges."*

- *Sounds of hair being cut. Followed by...*

- *A woman's voice saying: "Not too short!"*

- *Another woman then says: "I'm burning. When can you rinse it off?"*

- *And another replies: "It hasn't been on long enough. Your hair's not straight yet."*

- *Another woman saying: "Honey. I'm a hairstylist not a magician. I can give you Janet Jackson's hair but I can't make you look like her. No one can."*

- *Laughter. Lots and lots of laughter – loud, contagious, belly-busting laughter from women.*

Please note, that music with a gospel or R&B feel can also be played intermittently as audience members file in so that the audio doesn't begin to feel repetitive as it plays. As the lights go down, everyone in the audience will listen to the entire audio above in full, together, side by side. This is the first true scene of the play.*

Once this setting – this feeling of being inside of a Black women's hair salon – is firmly established, then the lights come up.)

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1. Welcome/The Audition

(We see one Black woman standing on stage. She begins speaking directly to the audience.)

ACTRESS. WELCOME!!!

How ya'll doing?

(Wait for audience response.)

Well, we're so glad you're here, for an evening of laughter and maybe even a few tears. Basically you paid for a theater ticket, but you may actually leave feeling like you spent a couple of hours with some really FUN, really funny, really engaging and really non-judgmental therapists.

We hope that when you leave you will feel as though you've spent the afternoon, or evening as the case may be, with old friends.

Or maybe you'll feel like you made some new ones.

Maybe a story will remind you of your mother or your sister. Maybe a story will remind you of the woman you once were, or the woman you hope to be. Or maybe even the woman you once hoped you COULD be.

(Pause.)

But most of all we hope that when you leave here you will know that regardless of all of the people out there whose only job seems to be trying to make us all feel insecure about who we are, you will know that you should hold your head high.

Not just because of who you are, but because of every little girl who *sees you for who you are.*

Think of your strength – your confidence – your pride, as your superpowers. Superpowers more powerful, more magical than ANY cape or kryptonite, because

they can save other women and girls just by showing them that they have a right to exist and BE SEEN... in a world that often treats us as invisible. If YOU have the courage to walk tall in a world that tries to make you feel small – then maybe other women and little girls will feel like they can too.

(Pause.)

So ENJOY!

Thank you.

(Pause.)

(A voice booms from the back of the theater. It's another lady. We hear her but do not see her during the course of this scene.)

CASTING DIRECTOR. Thank you!

That was great. That was really, really great. Moving.

Oh I see here you studied at Juilliard? What have you been doing since you graduated?

ACTRESS. A few readings... and uh... a commercial... a national commercial.

CASTING DIRECTOR. Oh yeah... I see that here. *(Pause.)*

I love Playtex tampons, by the way. They really are great.

ACTRESS. Yeah. They are. *(Pause.)*

That was actually my line in the commercial.

"You can count on Playtex. They really are great."

CASTING DIRECTOR. Well thanks for coming in.

ACTRESS. Thank you. *(She turns to go, then turns back.)*

Look, the truth is I've mainly been waiting tables since I graduated and when my agent told me that you all

were turning the book *Scars* into a play I told him to do whatever it takes to get me an audition. Because even if you don't have physical scars all of us have scars of some kind that we carry around with us, and within us. I've struggled with my weight and body image stuff for years and well… I just know what it's like to walk through the world and have people not see you but look right through you.

And the stories in this play are fundamentally about women wanting to be seen for who they are. Not dehumanized for who they are OR judged for who we are… and how we look. I mean *they*… how they look.

So that's all to say that I would do anything to get this part. *(Pause… catching how that sounds.)*

Well not ANYTHING… but you know… within reason…

(Pause.) And I'm not just saying that because I have less than two hundred dollars left in my bank account and they just cut my cable off…

(Pause. We hear the **CASTING DIRECTOR** *laugh.)*

CASTING DIRECTOR. Okay. I'll pass that on.

Thanks for coming in.

ACTRESS. Thanks for seeing me.

(She turns to go.)

CASTING DIRECTOR. Oh – one more thing. Your hair is adorable. What's that style called? It's not an afro exactly…

ACTRESS. Well it's natural. It's my natural curls…

CASTING DIRECTOR. "Natural"? Huh. Well, it's super cute.

ACTRESS. Thanks…

CASTING DIRECTOR. But I know they're doing a really stripped down production. They want all of the actresses to look as... well, *natural* as possible, so that means no wigs or anything. So would it be possible for you to change your hair?

ACTRESS. Ummm... change it how?

CASTING DIRECTOR. Well I don't really know much about YOUR kind of hair.

But I do know that they all like Michelle Obama. I mean all of the producers just donated to her husband's campaign so if you made your hair look more like hers, you'd be gold.

ACTRESS. Michelle Obama?

CASTING DIRECTOR. Yeah. Don't you just love her?

ACTRESS. Well of course... But...

CASTING DIRECTOR. So if you could just change your hair to how she wears hers, or you know how other professional-looking Black women wear theirs. You know, ladylike. Not an afro or braids... or natural or whatever, just nice and ladylike.

ACTRESS. Uh... so you want me to chemically straighten my hair?

CASTING DIRECTOR. I don't actually know what that means. But I DO know our producers are older and more traditional... you're just so talented. I'd hate for something as silly as how you CHOOSE to wear your hair to hurt your chances. *(Pause.)*

I mean this show could change your whole life. And after all, it's just hair.

(There is a palpable silence.)

ACTRESS. Um...um...

(Lights out.)

2. Everybody Has a Story

(When the lights come up the **ACTRESS** *steps forward as one of the* **LADIES** *in this scene and the* **CASTING DIRECTOR** *emerges from the audience to join as well, while the other* **LADY** *emerges from the wings...)*

LADY 1. Everybody has a story.

LADY 3. EVERYBODY!

LADY 2. Everybody!

Why is hair so, so...

LADY 3. ...much drama?

LADY 2. Yeah... and why is it such a source of... of...

LADY 1. Frustration?

LADY 3. Pain?

LADY 2. Heartache.

(The next two lines are delivered rapid fire...)

LADY 1. My grandmother used to call her hair her crown and glory...

LADY 2. My grandmother said I would have been pretty if my hair wasn't so NAPPY.

(This one is delivered slower...)

LADY 3. My great grandmother said the only reason her hair was straight was because the slaveowner who owned our family had raped her grandmother. So she LOVED that all of her great granddaughters had REALLY nappy hair.

(They all take a moment to take this statement in and to look at each other and the audience.)

LADY 1. Whether you have kinks…

LADY 2. Or curls…

LADY 3. Whether you're rich…

LADY 1. Or poor…

LADY 2. Thin…

LADY 3. Or thick…

LADY 1. Whether you have LOTS of hair…

LADY 2. Or none at all…

LADY 3. We ALL …

(They all look at each other.)

LADY 1, LADY 2 & LADY 3. Have a story about our crown and GLORY …

(Lights down.)

3. Don't Touch!

(This scene is intended to clearly affirm the ensemble nature of this piece. As such the delivery should feel like a fast-paced conversation between sisters who have told each other the same story so many times they deliver the lines almost in harmony like a trio singing one song.)

LADY 1. I had just started a new office job.

LADY 2. I was meeting my roommate's parents for the first time.

LADY 3. It was our first date.

LADY 1. "Good afternoon Wheeler & Keeler, how may I help you?"

LADY 2. I was the first person in my family to go to college, scholarship, of course. My roommate's grandfather had been President of the college and her great-grandfather had been Vice President… of the United States.

LADY 3. I met him on Raya, it's supposed to be a dating app for super successful people. I'd tried Tinder, I'd tried Bumble, I'd tried Match and so far I'd ended up with no engagement ring but two STIs and a restraining order.

LADY 1. I'd graduated top of my class at secretarial school. I was told Wheeler & Keeler was a great place to work. The executives there were supposed to be real decent. And some of them were also supposed to be REAL single… *(She smiles.)*

LADY 2. My roommate, was very tall, very thin, very blonde, VERY rich and VERY WOKE. If Wokeness Performance Art were a Major she would have graduated with honors. The first thing she did was introduce herself. The second thing she did was

apologize for her privilege. The third thing she did was give me a hug and then she burst into tears. It was… weird.

LADY 3. I'd never heard of him but apparently he was a successful hip-hop producer. He said he'd discovered his connection to the raw, emotional power of Black music when the teen rap group Kriss Kross performed their hit, *Jump* at his Bar Mitzvah.

(Pause.)

I could tell it was going to be a LONG night.

LADY 1. Everything was going pretty well. Everyone at the office seemed to like me.

LADY 2. I could tell my roommate liked me.

She told me that my essence reminded her of her favorite celebrity: Nina Simone… which was kind of odd because I don't sing and I'm biracial so I don't really look like Nina Simone at all. So it was… weird.

LADY 3. He told me he considered Billie Holliday the sexiest woman who ever walked the planet. And he considered her rendition of Strange Fruit the sexiest recording ever made.

I asked him he if realized the song was about lynching.

LADY 1. The only female executive at the office was a bigshot who went to Harvard or somewhere, but she made a point of inviting all of the assistants to lunch, which was really nice of her. Like a mentoring thing.

LADY 2. So even though she was a little weird… she was harmless and tried REALLY hard, so when she invited me to spend Thanksgiving with her family… I thought about it and I was seeing my family over Christmas anyway, and well… my roommate's family was spending Thanksgiving on their yacht… in the Caribbean. So… *(She smiles.)*

LADY 3. I knew there wouldn't be a second date. Nice guy, zero chemistry. And it's not because he's white. I'd dated white before. I'd dated Black before. I'd dated brown before. At this point I was willing to try dating someone blue. I just wanted a nice, normal guy that I vibe with. Hell, at this point I'd settle for a little chemistry and good credit.

LADY 1. It was at lunch that it happened…

LADY 2. It was actually during Thanksgiving dinner that it happened…

LADY 3. We had just ordered dessert when it happened…

LADY 1. The fancy lady executive told me she loved my look…

LADY 2. Her mother told me I was so pretty…

LADY 3. He told me I was beautiful…

(All three begin to speak in unison.)

LADY 1. And then she told me she loved my hair.

LADY 2. And then she told me she loved my hair.

LADY 3. And then he told me he loved my hair.

LADY 1. And then I saw it…

LADY 2. And then I saw it…

LADY 3. And then I saw it…

(They all reach out with their hands.)

LADY 1. The hand!!!!

LADY 2. The hand!!!

LADY 3. The hand!!!

(They stop speaking in unison.)

LADY 1. She touched my hair.

LADY 2. She actually touched my hair!

LADY 3. He reached over to touch my hair.

LADY 1. She said "It just looks so fun to touch, I couldn't resist!"

LADY 2. When I saw her hand coming, I didn't know what to do. I mean, I'm on her yacht for crying out loud. She's feeding me Thanksgiving dinner, I didn't want to be rude, but petting someone's hair like they're an animal IS RUDE!

LADY 3. When his hand got near my face… I didn't even know what was happening… what I was doing. It was like a Karate Kid style reflex. You know wax-on/wax-off *(She does the hand motion of waxing on a window from the* Karate Kid *movie.)*

LADY 1. I was shocked. And PISSED. She's an educated woman… She went to Harvard or somewhere, for crying out loud, she should know better!

LADY 2. These are rich people… they should know better.

LADY 3. He's a hip-hop producer. He's been around enough Black women. He should know better!

(Pause. They all stand in a powerful silence. And then…)

LADY 3. Well if he didn't know before. He knows now. Because unfortunately when I made my wax-on/wax-off motion my hand accidentally made contact with his nose, and well… broke it.

(Pause.)

LADY 2. She felt up my hair like we were on a first date.

I was humiliated and irritated. And had nowhere to go… the downside of being on a luxury yacht.

LADY 1. I didn't say anything… at first. I'm just a receptionist and she's an executive and I… was embarrassed.

LADY 2. I knew I should say something, but I also knew if I did I would be considered the poor little Black girl they treated to an extravagant vacation who then showed her gratitude by insinuating they're racist. I didn't know what to do…

LADY 3. I offered to pay for dinner. I didn't know what else to do…

LADY 1. And then I decided what to do. After she petted my hair, everyone continued eating, like nothing was wrong. And I realized that's the problem. No one at that table realized what she did to me was rude and wrong. So I waited until we were right in the middle of a good conversation. Everyone was laughing and then I stood up walked over to the fancy lady executive and began petting HER hair.

(The actor begins miming feeling up someone else's scalp.)

I said, "You know, your hair feels really interesting. So different. What do you use on it?" She looked real confused and then kind of terrified and then just mumbled something about shampoo. I just grinned and then I sat back down and continued eating as if nothing had happened.

LADY 2. And then I decided to kill them… with kindness. *(She smiles.)*

After my roommate's mom finished groping my hair and telling me how "interesting" it felt, I stood up and announced that everyone was welcome to walk by my chair and pet my head since I'd noticed that Caucasian people loved doing that so much. I then said if it would be more convenient, I would be willing to walk by every single chair and lean over so they could feel my hair without leaving the comfort of their seats.

LADY 1. She avoided me in the hallway every time she saw me after that. But one of the other assistants emailed me later to tell me that I was a "bad ass" for standing up for myself. The two of us went to lunch the next day and ended up becoming best friends.

LADY 2. My roommate's mother turned bright red, and then asked her dad to carve the turkey but then my roommate did something else: she laughed. Then she asked if I wanted to pet *her* hair to make up for her mom petting mine. I realized in that moment that my roommate may have been cooler than I'd given her credit for. I mean, her mother didn't laugh and I knew that would be my last time on their yacht. But I didn't care, because I also knew it would be *her* last time petting a Black woman's head like a puppy.

LADY 3. I took him to the hospital. And then something strange happened. He told me it was the most interesting first date he'd ever been on, and asked me for a second. The truth is, I wasn't that into him, but the fact that he had such a sense of humor about the whole thing… well I figured why not… but I made him promise me one thing…

LADY 1. PLEASE promise me one thing…

LADY 2. I hope you will **all** promise me one thing.

(They all speak in unison.)

LADY 1. DON'T EVER TOUCH A BLACK WOMAN'S HAIR WITHOUT HER PERMISSION.

LADY 2. DON'T EVER TOUCH A BLACK WOMAN'S HAIR WITHOUT HER PERMISSION.

LADY 3. DON'T EVER TOUCH A BLACK WOMAN'S HAIR WITHOUT HER PERMISSION.

(Lights down.)

4. Dear God, It's Me, Amaya

(When lights come up the year 1995 should be visible somewhere on the stage. This scene can either be delivered via audio, previously recorded by an actor [with accompanying imagery that conveys Black girlhood, such as the silhouette of a child] or the piece can be performed by an adult actor channeling a child.)

AMAYA. Dear God…

This is Amaya… but you know that already because mommy says you know… everything.

Which means… you know that I actually DID DO the thing yesterday that I told mommy I didn't do.

And I know I'm not supposed to lie… so… sorry about that. But I only lied because she said if I get into trouble one more time this week I can't go to Samantha's sleepover. And since you know EVERYTHING God, I know, YOU KNOW that's not fair.

So… I'm praying to say sorry I didn't tell mommy the truth…

And I'm also praying because it's my birthday soon. I'll be eight.

I know you already know that… but I'm just reminding you, because there's a list of presents I want and I know there are lots of kids in the world who have birthdays you have to remember and I know I mentioned this yesterday but just in case you forgot: I really want a dog. I'll settle for a new bicycle but I really want a dog.

In Sunday school we learned that it's important to pray for others, not just for ourselves. So I am praying to ask that you bless Samantha with tickets to see N'Sync for HER birthday…

(Pause.)

So that I can go see them with her.

I also wanted to pray and ask that you bless Sherry at her audition this weekend so that she gets the part she wants on *Sister, Sister*…

(Pause.)

So that I can go with her and meet Tia and Tamera.

I also hope you will bring my daddy home safe. I know what he's doing's important. Mommy says he's a hero who saves people and that's why he's away so much.

But I already knew that. Daddy's always been MY hero.

He SAVES ME from getting in trouble with mommy all the time.

Mommy says daddy lets me get away with murder which is NOT true.

I've NEVER murdered anyone.

See mommies lie sometimes too.

Speaking of murder, I know I'm not allowed to ask you to kill anyone God, but Tommy Smith has been really mean. He put gum in my hair. He got in trouble for it but I don't think he got in enough trouble. See mommy had to cut the gum out of my hair and now I look like a boy. Or more like a boy. The other girls at school have pretty hair and I don't. I know I don't because none of the boys say I have pretty hair. Tyrone and Jerome are the only boys in my class who look like me and Sherry is the only girl who looks like me. But her mom is white so Sherry has long hair with big curls. So I was wondering if it wouldn't be too much trouble and you're not too busy, could you please bless me with

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