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SLEEPOVA

by Matilda Feyiṣayọ Ibini

SAMUEL FRENCH

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SLEEPOVA was first produced at the Bush Theatre in London, England on 24 February 2023. The cast was as follows:

FUNMI (OLUWAFUNMILAYO) . . . . . Bukky Bakray
REY (ALFREDA) . . . . . Amber Grappy
SHAN (SHANICE) . . . . . Aliyah Odoffin
ELLE (GABRIELLE) . . . . . Shayde Sinclair

The role of Funmi's Dad was voiced by Jude Akuwudike.

The creative team was as follows:

DIRECTOR . . . . . Jade Lewis
SET & COSTUME DESIGN . . . . . Cara Evans
LIGHTING DESIGN . . . . . Elliot Griggs
SOUND DESIGN . . . . . XANA
COMPOSER . . . . . Romarna Campbell
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR . . . . . Gabrielle Nimo
COSTUME SUPERVISOR . . . . . Imogen Brown
VOICE & DIALECT COACH . . . . . Gurkiran Kaur
FIGHT & INTIMACY DIRECTOR . . . . . Enric Ortuño
PRODUCTION DRAMATHERAPIST . . . . . Wabriya King
DRAMATURGY . . . . . Deirdre O'Halloran
CASTING DIRECTOR . . . . . Jatinder Chera
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLACEMENT) . . . . . Apoorva Anagalli
PRODUCTION MANAGER . . . . . Pete Rickards for eStage
COMPANY STAGE MANAGER . . . . . Lucy Ventham
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER . . . . . Sophie Haliburn
PRODUCTION TECHNICIAN . . . . . Rori Endersby
REHEARSAL SCRIBE . . . . . Jennifer Okolo

CHARACTERS

FUNMI (Oluwafunmilayo) – she/her, black, starts play age fifteen, of Nigerian heritage.

REY (Alfreda) – she/her, femme, black or black-mixed race, proudly Queer, various ages, plus-size, starts play age fifteen, of Grenadian and English heritage.

SHAN (Shanice) – she/her, black, various ages, starts play age sixteen, of Nigerian and Jamaican heritage, has sickle cell.

ELLE (Gabrielle) – she/her, black or black-mixed race, various ages, starts play age fifteen, of Jamaican heritage.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This is to black girls and femmes whose parents never allowed them to attend sleepovers – well consider this play an invitation. You are safe here. You can be yourself here. You can dream here.

This play encourages collaboration, for example the ethnicities described in the cast list are open for you to adapt to the performers playing a specific character. This also means there is some degree of flexibility in tweaking details or slang to fit specific cultures.

Some people might wonder – Matilda why's there so much swearing in this. Because young people swear, maybe not in front of you but they do. I wanted to write a play about a bunch of girls who resist respectability which is often forced and projected onto black girls. These are characters pushing back against having their language policed. Now I understand it may not be appropriate for school productions, that's when I encourage some imaginative thinking in swapping out the swearing but any other future professional staging of this play – I want to hear every syllable of every fucking word.

This is my second full-length play to be published. *Sleepova* is my third produced full-length play in a now twelve-plus-year career. (Take that imposter syndrome!)

Care, joy, direction and comfort is at the heart of this play, so ensure it's embedded in the production too!

Notes on the script

– at the end of a line of dialogue or stage direction means an interruption.

/ means two or more characters talking over each other. If at the start of a line of dialogue, it can also indicate when the next character should begin speaking over the other character.

... means a brief break, longer than a beat but shorter than a pause. Can also mean when a character struggles to form words in their mouth.

Suggested interval after Scene Four but only if needed.

The music mentioned in the script is suggestive rather than prescriptive.

Content Warnings

Strong language
Experiences of living with sickle cell
References to and description of mental illness and physical illness
Frequent themes of and references to homophobia, racism and sexism
Absent parents
Mention of a rape alarm
References to grief and bereavement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Infinite thanks to my family: Adebanke, Tolulope, Ayotunde, Babajide, my relatives and my ancestors. What an honour it is to love and be loved by you.

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Huge love and thanks to my tireless champion and agent Ikenna Obiekwe – here's to many more fruitful years and even greater heights with you.

To the phenomenal constellation of talent: Aliyah Odoffin, Amber Grappy, Bukky Bakray and Shayde Sinclair – I have so much love for all of you. What exciting careers you all have in store!

Massive thanks and huge love to the exceptional creative team behind the production: Oscar Owen, Jatinder Chera, Cara Evans, Imogen Brown, XANA, Pete Rickards, Lucy Ventham, Sophie Haliburn, Romarna Campbell, Gabrielle Nimo, Apoorva Anagalli, Jennifer Okolo, Nikita Karia, Gurkiran Kaur, Wabriya King, Elliot Griggs, Helen Murray and Doug Kerr (for the wicked poster!) – thank you all so much for your hard work, astronomical talents and unwavering belief in the story. Thank you to the team at Concord for publishing my second full-length play and for their continued support of my work!

Big ups to Jade Lewis – director extraordinaire and all-round legend! Your support, enthusiasm and wisdom has meant so much to me. Thank you for bringing your heart to this production and going on this whirlwind of a journey with me.

My super and dedicated team of PAs (past and present): Mona, Alex, Emilie, Vanessa, Tarmin, Jaida, Lujayna, Inga, Rebecca and Hadiza (thank you for the late nights, pep talks, typing duties, and patience).

Sleepova is a blueprint of collective dreaming and would not exist without an empathetic community of dreamers.

To all the Black girls, women, femmes, non-binary peopledem of the past, present and future who continue to find ways to stand firm and upright in a crooked world.

PRESHOW

(The **CAST** *introduces themselves to the audience. They each provide a physical self-description; this is a type of audio description where a performer vocalises their own visual appearance. Physical self-descriptions should not be about identity, no one is being asked to out themself in any way or make the performer uncomfortable, but rather it is done to address a physical access issue and helps to level the playing field so this show is as accessible to as many people as possible. Explore what the pre-show could look like and make it your own! The below dialogue can be used, cut, tweaked etc. However the cast must find a way to introduce themselves before the show starts.)*

(Self-description details can include: your real name and the character/s you will be playing, ethnicity, hair colour and hair style, height and any noticeable details like glasses, braces, piercings etc.)

(The **CAST** *tosses a 'theatre etiquette' ball to each other, saying their least favourite audience behaviour rules.)*

CAST 1. No honest reactions!

CAST 2. No fidgeting!

CAST 4. No snacking!

CAST 3. No getting involved!

CAST 2. No getting up to go toilet!

CAST 4. No getting comfortable!

(One of them pierces the ball with an object of their choosing. They watch it deflate. They all stomp on it together, toss in some wrestling moves.)

ALL. *(Variously.)* YEAHHHH! / Die! Die! Die! / Oloshi! And if I see you round these ends again yeah –

CAST 1. Sorry – theatre etiquette is not welcome here!

CAST 2. We want every kind of body to feel welcome in this space.

CAST 3. Cough till your lungs collapse.

CAST 4. Okay maybe not that. Just don't stifle it.

CAST 1. You don't have to wait till there's a loud bit in the story.

CAST 3. Same goes with farts, we want you to feel comfortable.

CAST 1. Not that comfortable. However –

CAST 4. – Should you need a break, feel free to leave and then return. There'll be someone to assist you back to your seat.

CAST 1. Turn your phones off or put them on silent. The play isn't even that long – *kay*.

CAST 2. Can we all do that now quickly, phone check, crep check, fine check. Yeah, you're all looking damn good today.

CAST 1. Especially you. I see you.

(All the **CAST** *blow a kiss or wink at someone in the audience.)*

CAST 3. Cos I swear if we hear a phone go off, this is the look you'll get.

(They all give their best mean, vicious death stare to each direction of the audience.)

Taking me out of character *bumbaclart*!

CAST 4. And if you miss a bit –

CAST 1. – Just grab a copy of that super accurate play text, that was published before we even opened.

CAST 2. We are not new to this.

CAST 3. We're true to this. *(Crosses fingers.)* Promise.

CAST 4. Who here's ever been to a sleepova?

CAST 1. Raise your hand, clap, nod, woop, wink, wave.

(The **CAST** *encourages the audience to raise their hands or whoop. The* **CAST** *can ad-lib here.)*

CAST 2. Well this is for anyone who wasn't ever allowed to go to a sleepova.

CAST 4. Or wasn't invited to a sleepova.

CAST 1. Or whose mum picked her up at half eleven – before eye crust could even form like little canary diamonds in her eyes.

CAST 3. It's okay friend – heal.

CAST 4. Well you have now.

CAST 2. Cos you're officially invited to ours.

CAST 3. We're popping your sleepova cherry.

CAST 4. Don't worry we'll be gentle.

CAST 3. I've got protection.

*(***CAST 3** *whips out a bottle of hand sanitizer, they use some and share it with the rest of the* **CAST**.*)*

(Once they are all sanitized, they each put on their bonnet, silk head scarf or durag. They high-five each other and gass each other up, like a team before a big match.)

(The **CAST** *exits to get ready.)*

Scene One

(Shan's bedroom. September 2016.)

*(**SHAN** is cleaning her bedroom. She carefully takes down her anime posters but leaves her Paramore poster up. She hides the posters somewhere discreet in her room. She chucks her cuddly toys into the bottom of her wardrobe and throws clothes on top of them for good measure. She runs up and down her bedroom with Impulse body spray, she starts to cough. She smells herself and sprays some over her clothes and then sprays some more around the room. She empties a bag of popcorn into a bowl.)*

*(**ELLE** knocks before she enters with a sleeping bag and a large backpack.)*

ELLE. Aloha! Happy Birthday! Smells like the girls' toilets here.

SHAN. It's not that bad, is it?

ELLE. Let's just open –

*(**ELLE** opens the door.)*

*(**SHAN** tries to disperse the smell with a pillow.)*

ELLE. I've got Haribo, milk choc digestives – dark choc tastes evil, torch, first-aid kit, Swiss Army knife and brought my dad's laptop, it can play DVDs too –

SHAN. You are a literal lifesaver.

ELLE. Oh your present –

*(**ELLE** rummages into her backpack and brings out a small, neatly-wrapped gift.)*

*(**SHAN** snatches the gift from **ELLE**'s hands and excitedly tears it open. She looks at the gift peculiarly.)*

A keyring... necklace?

ELLE. It's a rape alarm.

SHAN. ...Thanks.

ELLE. Yours has this really cool laser on it. So you can blind rapists, murderers, serial killers, satanists – they usually hunt in pairs. And it'll give you enough time to escape.

*(**ELLE** points the laser at the ceiling.)*

SHAN. I really appreciate all this Elle.

ELLE. *"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed"* – proverbs 19 – verse – yep.

SHAN. We're not – my mum has a morning and a night job, but she just doesn't get a lot of money.

ELLE. I know.

(Beat.)

SHAN. We're going to have so much fun, our very first sleepova! I can't believe we convinced all our parents.

ELLE. My dad's picking me up at midnight.

SHAN. Elle – but you said –

ELLE. – Yes that I could come over but not that I could sleep over, my mum wasn't having it.

SHAN. Did you try –

ELLE. – I tried everything in the plan. I gave them your mum's number, her email, I even gave them your mum's work address. They know your mum is a Christian and she goes to church every Sunday, she's not a tourist

Christian. I even showed them the personal statement your mum wrote. It did work because I am here, but they will pick me up at midnight.

SHAN. Alright Cinderella, I knew I should have got my mum to do a DBS.

ELLE. My mum says why should I be sleeping in other people's houses when I'm not homeless.

SHAN. It's fine. You're here that's all that matters.

(The sound of a buzzer buzzing a little too excitedly.)

I'll go let them in.

ELLE. Relax birthday girl, I'll get it.

*(***ELLE** *exits to answer the door.)*

REY. *(Offstage.)* Where's the birthday girl?

(Giggling can be heard from outside the bedroom.)

(Shan's door swings open. **REY** *and* **FUNMI** *come bursting in, rounding off the sleepova.)*

(The four of them excitedly do their not-so secret chant.)

REY & FUNMI. ALOHA BITCHES!

ELLE & SHAN. ALOHA BITCHES!

REY. Konnichiwa cunts.

ALL. Konnichiwa cunts.

FUNMI. Sayonara later-loser.

ALL. Sayonara later-loser.

REY. O dabọ forever.

ALL. O dabọ forever.

(Their chant descends into giggles.)

*(**FUNMI** hugs **ELLE** then **SHAN**, but **REY** hugs **SHAN** and very briefly hugs **ELLE**.)*

*(**FUNMI**, **REY** and **ELLE** freestyle a soulful version of Happy Birthday to **SHAN**.)*

*(**REY** gets out a lighter and lights a cupcake.)*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR SHAN!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TOOOOOOOOO YOUUUUUUUUU!

FUNMI. Close your eyes and make a wish.

*(**SHAN** closes her eyes, and blows out the candle.)*

SHAN. My wish has already come true.

*(**REY** smears the cupcake in **SHAN**'s face.)*

Rey!

*(**FUNMI** and **REY** laugh while **ELLE** helps **SHAN** to wipe her face.)*

REY. It was only a teeny cupcake.

SHAN. I wanted to eat that.

REY. Your present's better *(Winks.)* – promise.

*(**REY** hands **SHAN** an envelope.)*

SHAN. Aww thank you Rey.

FUNMI. It's from both of us.

REY. It's not.

*(**SHAN** opens the envelope, it's a birthday card.)*

SHAN. Oh my days! A hundred-pound MAC voucher. Rey this is too much.

REY. I don't seem to hear a thank you.

SHAN. Thank you!

*(***SHAN** *hugs* **REY**.*)*

REY. Got to make sure our girl's always looking flawless. We can't all wake up looking like me. I stole some posh seaweed face masks from my stepmum, they don't work on her saggy old skin but they should work for us. Don't know what my dad sees in that sea creature, when all they do is argue.

*(***FUNMI** *and* **REY** *unpack their things.* **FUNMI** *takes off her jacket to reveal pyjamas.)*

Don't tell me you've been wearing that the whole time we travelled here?

FUNMI. I didn't want to waste any time changing.

REY. That same bum, you sat on the bus with, is the same one you want to be sharing a mattress with me.

FUNMI. Did we not take the same bus?

REY. Did I sit on the bus though? I don't even hold the poles.

SHAN. Ew, bus bum.

ELLE. It's not hygienic.

FUNMI. Whatever fam. Now open mine next. I hope you like it.

*(***FUNMI** *hands* **SHAN** *an envelope.)*

*(***SHAN** *opens the envelope.)*

SHAN. Happy Birthday Sailor Moon-Shan! Wait – what are these?

FUNMI. – So found out I can't officially donate blood until I'm seventeen, ageist bastards – like what's wrong with my blood? It's fresh, this is premium plasma they could be tapping into. So instead I convinced my dad and my sister to donate blood in my place. Didn't bother asking my mum, she'll think her blood could be used for rituals and she doesn't like the idea of accidentally saving her enemies.

ELLE. Rah, you got your family to give blood?

*(***FUNMI** *nods proudly.)*

FUNMI. The way I see it, if I ever needed blood I'd want at least five pints from every single one of you that claims to love me.

ELLE. The human body only carries ten pints.

FUNMI. Just say you don't love me **joh**!

SHAN. You're actually the best.

FUNMI. My dad's already booked his next one.

REY. That's not a present… cheapskate.

*(***SHAN** *hugs* **FUNMI**.*)*

FUNMI. Blood is priceless. More precious than any common voucher.

ELLE. It's true. Christ's crucifixion was an act of love. True Christians believe in transubstantiation. So giving blood is an act of love too.

FUNMI. *(Pause.)* See even our resident Pastor approves.

*(***FUNMI** *high-fives* **ELLE**.*)*

REY. Well you still need make-up when you die so.

SHAN. I feel all funny inside.

ELLE. Good funny or bad funny?