

Acting Edition

Last Night and the Night Before

by Donnetta Lavinia Grays

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-71106-0

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LAST NIGHT AND THE NIGHT BEFORE received its world premiere at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts on January 25, 2019. The performance was directed by Valerie Curtis-Newton, with scenic design by Matthew Smucker, costume design by Melanie Burgess, lighting design by Mary Louise Geiger, sound design by Larry D. Fowler Jr., voice and dialect coaching by Dwight Bacquie, dramaturgy by Jacqueline E. Lawton, and casting by Harriet Bass, CSA and Grady Soapes, CSA. The production stage manager was Randall K. Lum, the assistant stage manager was Kristen O'Connor, and the apprentice stage manager was Wayne Breyer. The cast was as follows:

SAM Zaria Kelley
MONIQUE Keona Welch
REGGIE Sharod Choyce
RACHEL Bianca Laverne Jones
NADIMA Erin Cherry

LAST NIGHT AND THE NIGHT BEFORE made its Chicago premiere at Steppenwolf Theater Company on April 16, 2023. The performance was directed by Valerie Curtis-Newton, with scenic design by Regina Garcia, costume design by Izumi Inaba, lighting design by Mary Louise Geiger, sound design by Larry D. Fowler Jr., voice and dialect coaching by Gigi Buffington, intimacy choreography by Kristen Baity, and casting by JC Clementz. The producing director was Tom Pearl, the production stage manager was Laura D. Glenn, the assistant stage manager was Jaclynn Joslin, and the assistant director was Alex Dauphin. The cast was as follows:

SAM Kaylah Renee Jones
MONIQUE Ayanna Bria Bakari
REGGIE Namir Smallwood
RACHEL Sydney Charles
NADIMA Jessica Dean Turner

Aliyana Nicole rotated the role of Sam with Ms. Jones after opening night.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

LAST NIGHT AND THE NIGHT BEFORE (formerly *SAM*) was developed in New York City partly through Naked Angels' Tuesdays@9 open reading series (Andrea Cirie and Joe Danisi, Creative Directors) and was given a more formal public reading with Naked Angels (Andy Donald, Artistic Director) on March 4, 2013, in their 1st Mondays reading series. The reading was directed by Colette Robert.

Excerpts of the play were read as part of Classical Theatre of Harlem's Playwrights Playground on March 11, 2013. The play was featured as part of Classical Theatre of Harlem's Future Classics Reading Series (Ty Jones, Artistic Director; Shawn Rene Graham, Curator) on December 16, 2013. Colette Robert directed.

In November 2014 the play was given a reading through The Actors Studio's Playwright/Directors Unit of which Donnetta was a member. Woodie King Jr. directed.

The play received an extensive workshop May 4–9, 2015, through Portland Stage Company's Little Festival of the Unexpected (Anita Stewart, Artistic Director). Sally Wood directed.

The play received an extensive rehearsal and reading November 3–9, 2015, as part of Orlando Shakespeare Theater's Annual PlayFest (Jim Helsinger, Artistic Director; Cynthia White, Curator). Lisa Wolpe directed.

The play received a reading as part of LAByrrinth Theater Company's Barn Series (Mimi O'Donnell, Artistic Director; Kevin Snipes, Artistic Associate/Curator) on June 10, 2016. Colette Robert directed.

The play received further development as part of Denver Center for the Arts' (Kent Thompson, Artistic Director; Douglas Langworthy, Director of New Play Development) Colorado New Play Summit, February 14–26, 2017. Valerie Curtis-Newton directed. Lauren Whitehead was dramaturg.

CHARACTERS

SAM – A ten-year-old girl. Smart. Sharp. Inquisitive. Dark. Loving.

MONIQUE – Sam’s mother. Early–mid twenties. A poet. A lost soul. Loving.

REGGIE – Sam’s father. Early–mid twenties. Loving to a fault. Boyish. Unflinching.

RACHEL – Sam’s aunt. Monique’s sister. Mid thirties. Warm-hearted. Steely but with cracks. Guilt-ridden. Loving.

NADIMA – Rachel’s girlfriend. Mid thirties. Playful. Charming. Funny. Fiercely protective. Loving.

SETTING & TIME

The play takes place today in a smartly – yet not overly – decorated brownstone in Brooklyn, just outside that brownstone, back in time a few moments to “Vixten,” Georgia, and presently on an unnamed city street.

There should be a way for the interior and exterior of the brownstone to be simultaneously visible. The kitchen should be somewhat visible from the living room and should assume that a sit-in kitchen table is hidden.

Vixten, Georgia, should not live in the concrete world. Along with the unnamed street, Vixten should either drape around or flow into the Brooklyn spaces as they are conjured. Georgia red clay should feature prominently into the design and may bleed into the Brooklyn space.

Each scene should flow into the next holding the lyricism of the play at the forefront. An air of what has just happened should stay inside of what is happening now. Past and present are liquid. Limit the use of blackouts.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Sam is in no way a “magical” child. The hand games she plays or is introduced to should inform the development of each flashback and give us insight into her mental state. Each song has a specific meaning as it relates to those scenes and serves as an active conjuring or wishful reinventing of her circumstances. Monique holds the power of this imagination as well.

Rachel and Nadima are lesbians. Simply and affirmatively. They exist in both feminine and masculine space fluidly. Resist any impulse to emulate a heteronormative relationship or define them through a heteronormative gaze. Allow their love to be complex and for their story to be rooted in that complex love.

Resist the urge to paint Nadima with the singular brush of brashness. Her lightness and humor, balanced with her sense of protection for Rachel, are crucial to understanding their love story.

Monique, Reggie, and Sam have a secret. The careful calibration of what is true in what they reveal to Rachel and Nadima will determine if the audience gets ahead of it or not. Aim for subtlety. Allow Sam to come into Rachel emotionally and Rachel room to struggle in her adopted role as caretaker/adoptive mother.

The Vixten dialect is one that I imagine with soft notes of Gullah Geechee sounds that one might find in the city decedents of Coastal Georgia/South Carolina Lowcountry people (Think: The rapper T.I. and his wife Tiny).

We get a soft Gullah Geechee line from Rachel in Act Two, Scene One:

“Girl! You ain’t only gonna be actin’ ’umanish you gwine be an actualized ’uman!”

Which translates to: “You ain’t only going to be acting ‘woman-ish’ you are going to be an actualized woman!”

Slashes (/) indicate overlapping. Dashes (-) indicate cut-offs or a quick turn of thought.

Brackets ([]) indicate subtext.

Finally, Monique has several quick changes. More than one dresser and/or underdressing will be needed. Apologies from the playwright.

ACT ONE

Prologue

*(A moonlit night. It is quiet. Then, the gently increasing sounds of a shovel piercing the earth and the work [the breath, grunts, and aches] of a man digging that earth fill the space. The digging is purposeful, intense, and almost coming to an end. Lights partially reveal a **YOUNG MAN** in motion – sweat on his brow, determined. He wears a white work shirt, dark pants, rubber gloves, and dustcovers on his shoes. Maybe even a hair net. Blood and dirt have made a mess of his clothes. He adjusts a gun in his waistband. At his feet is a body wrapped in a blanket and tied tightly around the ankles, at the waist, and at the shoulders with tape or rope or whatever he could find. Exhausted, the **MAN** gulps water from a bottle as though he has never tasted such relief. Then, the sound of a swelling distant breath fills the air. It is panicked. Short. Fearful. Just over the **MAN**'s shoulder lights partially reveal a **YOUNG GIRL** sitting knees to chest. Her eyes transfixed on the body. She is a little done up. Almost as if she's headed for Sunday school. A contrary figure in such a dark place. The **MAN**, sensing a presence, turns but sees no one. He returns to the hole he has dug. Studies it. He is tired*

*but there is more work to be done. He drags the body as far as he can and kicks it into the freshly made grave. He spits into the grave. Wipes his brow. Turns back to check his surroundings. Sees no one. A fresh panicked breath fights with the words stuck in the little girl's throat as she tries to mouth some sweet inaudible thing. Lights begin to fade on the **GRAVEDIGGER** and the gently decreasing sounds of a shovel and the work [the breath, grunts, and aches] of a man returning the earth from which it came. Just as lights begin to rise on a **YOUNG GIRL** meeting a Brooklyn morning and the increasing sound of her nearly stunted voice...)*

SAM.

Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack
All dressed in black black black
With silvah buttons buttons buttons
All down her back back back

Scene One

*(The early morning light fully reveals **SAM** [ten] as she sits knees to chest curbside on a brown-stoned tree-lined Brooklyn street. Sounds of African, Caribbean, and hip-hop music meld with Islamic and Jewish prayers and the sounds of traffic. She continues to nervously sing/play this hand game by herself.)*

SAM.

She asked her mother mother mother

For fifteen cents...cents...

(A car zooms by playing some loud calypso song. It startles her a bit. She covers her ears. Breathes deeply. Tries a different song. Whispers to herself as she lightly goes through the motions.)

Let's get the rhythm of head *(Nods head.)*

Let's get the rhythm of the hands *(Clap, Clap.)*

Let's get the rhythm of feet *(Stomp, Stomp.)*

Let's get the rhythm...

(She is lost in her anxiety and the song trails off. She holds her knees closer to her chest.)

*(**MONIQUE**, Sam's mom, enters agitated looking at a piece of paper. She is in her early twenties and could pass for Sam's sister. She wears jeans, t-shirt, sneakers, and hoodie. She stops in front of **SAM** who stares at her mother like a stranger. Or maybe even a ghost. There is a held tension between these two.)*

It's right here.

MONIQUE. Why you ain't said nothin'?

SAM. I did, mama. You ain't *listen* to me!

MONIQUE. Watch ya mouth.

SAM. Yes ma'am.

MONIQUE. Fix ya'self up.

(MONIQUE pats SAM's hair back with her hands.)

Lemme see ya teeth! Come on. Warm the sun up, baby.

(SAM forces a smile.)

There you go. Nah, you gonna smile jus' like that when we see ya aunties, 'kay?

SAM. Yes ma'am.

MONIQUE. Gotta to put on a good show fah they bougie asses.

SAM. Yes ma'am.

MONIQUE. Nah don't go repeatin' that alright.

SAM. *(Gets anxious. Starts to lose her breath.)* Yes ma'—

MONIQUE. *(Taking SAM by the shoulders.)* Unh uh, now. Come on. Look at me. Look at mama, baby. Breathe. Breathe fah me.

(They breathe together and after a moment SAM calms down.)

Better?

SAM. *(Uncertain.)* Yes ma'am.

MONIQUE. Yeah. You good. You gonna be jus' fine. 'Kay?

(She kisses her daughter's forehead. SAM recoils a little. MONIQUE registers this.)

Sho you ain't hungry?

SAM. (*Whiney. Exhausted.*) Mama, I said I wasn't -.

MONIQUE. (*Sucks teeth.*) Hush up! No. You 'bout to eat inna minute.

(**SAM** pouts. *They climb the stairs of the brownstone. MONIQUE rings the bell. Then, knocks loudly at the door. They wait. She knocks again.*)

SAM. Maybe they ain't home.

MONIQUE. (*Snaps.*) Dammit I said hush!

(**MONIQUE** looks at **SAM** with a little desperation. *She knocks again. Then, the sounds of WOMEN laughing as the lights rise on the inside of the brownstone. Another knock. After a moment, an attractive woman in her mid thirties - NADIMA - appears in the bedroom doorway adjusting her robe.*)

RACHEL. (*From the bedroom. Pouty.*) Get rid of them and come back!

NADIMA. (*Flirty. To the bedroom.*) Woman, if you move a single solitary inch... my god.

(**SAM** stands behind her mother shyly. **MONIQUE** rings the doorbell. **NADIMA** turns on a light to the living room heading toward the accosted front door.)

RACHEL. (*From the bedroom.*) Tell them our souls are saved and we *have* heard the good news!

(*They laugh.*)

NADIMA. Ha! (*To the door.*) Please do not knock my door down!

(**NADIMA** looks through the eyehole. Stops. Looks through the eyehole again. Hesitates. Opens the door. An awkward silence as the **WOMEN** stand not quite knowing what to say.)

MONIQUE. (*Big and playfully.*) Hey!

NADIMA. (*Beat. In shock, she calls back toward the bedroom.*) Babe...? It's for you!

(**RACHEL** – *mid thirties and warm-hearted – calls sleepily from the bedroom.*)

RACHEL. You can't handle it?

NADIMA. It's a...a surprise.

(**NADIMA** crosses into the bedroom leaving **MONIQUE** to hang back waiting uncomfortably. **RACHEL** enters from the bedroom adjusting her robe.)

RACHEL. (*Seeing MONIQUE. Her stomach sinks.*) Jesus...

MONIQUE. Recognize the face?

RACHEL. Neekie. Neekie?! Oh, my god! What are you [doing] –

MONIQUE. Sammie, get from behind me 'n say hey tah ya auntie.

RACHEL. Sam? Oh, my god, Sam!

SAM. Hey, Aunt Rachel.

MONIQUE. She big right?

RACHEL. I was just about to say. Let me look at you.

(**SAM** goes to her aunt.)

Lord have mercy... (*Calls to the bedroom.*) Baby, Sam with her!

(NADIMA reappears from the bedroom now dressed in pajamas.)

NADIMA. Sam? I didn't see the kid. / Hey, munchkin.

RACHEL. I know, right?

SAM. Hey Aunt / Dima

RACHEL. You are so big. Look at your hair –

NADIMA. I didn't see you / standing back there.

MONIQUE. Hidin' behind me. / Tryna act shy.

RACHEL. Who did that for you? Your mama?

SAM. Yes ma'am.

(Silence.)

RACHEL. Well, don't just stand there. Why y'all just standing there?

MONIQUE. Well, let us in, girl!

RACHEL. *(Ushering them in.)* Oh shoot. Right! Look at me. Come on in! Y'all come on in here.

NADIMA. Uh... Coffee?

RACHEL. You want some coffee?

MONIQUE. Yeah that'd be good.

(NADIMA exits to the kitchen.)

(To RACHEL.) Also, Sam a lil hungry if y'all got anythang.

(MONIQUE cuts a look to SAM who cuts a look right back. They are still quietly fighting.)

RACHEL. Nadima, –

NADIMA. I heard.

(Beat.)

RACHEL. Wow!

MONIQUE. Yeah.

(An uneasy beat.)

RACHEL. You're here.

MONIQUE. *(Jokingly.)* Well, you know, we was drivin' around n'...we was jus' in the neighborhood.

RACHEL. From Georgia?

MONIQUE. So...

(Beat.)

RACHEL. *(Calling to the kitchen.)* Nadima, Sam's coming in the kitchen to help you out! *(To SAM.)* Sam, go on in there and let Aunt Dima know what you want to eat, baby.

SAM. Yes ma'am.

(They watch her reluctantly exit. MONIQUE a little satisfied.)

RACHEL. Where's Reggie?

MONIQUE. He ain't in the car.

(Beat.)

RACHEL. Why don't you have a seat, baby.

MONIQUE. I been on my ass fah over ten hours, girl. Feels good bein' on my feet.

RACHEL. You got uh, bags...or anything?

MONIQUE. Little bit 'a stuff out in the car. My car gonna be alright out 'dey?

RACHEL. Should be.

(Beat.)

Please start talking.

MONIQUE. (*Laughs nervously.*) Girl... (*Looks up.*) Gre'd day! How far up this ceilin' go? This is nice.

RACHEL. Thank you.

MONIQUE. I like this block too. But, I can live wit'out all that traffic I can tell ya that right nah! Thank I lost 'bout ten years offa my life. The noise is like...ugh!! Forever wit' all that honkin'!

RACHEL. You get used to it.

MONIQUE. You move here what? 'Bout two – three years / ago?

RACHEL. Two. Neekie?

MONIQUE. He gone. Yep yep yep. Far from Vixten by now I 'magine.

RACHEL. Where?

MONIQUE. I don't know. A man is a...complicated mess of a thang, ain't they? Well, hell you don't know.

RACHEL. Monique.

MONIQUE. No, ...I ain't tryna be funny. I'm jus' tryna fix my head 'round a couple thangs. An' it's complicated. It's all a lil messed up right nah.

(*Beat.*)

He uh lost his job. Chil' they downsized that plant so much it ain't even 'nere no more hardly.

RACHEL. Carson's shutting down?

MONIQUE. Jus' bout. D'ere's a big ole hole in town. *You* wouldn't recognize it anymore that's fah sure. (*Off RACHEL.*) Anyway...he tried gettin' other work. He even applied tah a couple 'a fast food places. Like wit' me? But he ain't wanna do that really. His pride get in the way... An' he was on unemployment fah a minute. Then that ran out 'n –

RACHEL. And so did *he*?

MONIQUE. That's the story.

RACHEL. Short story.

MONIQUE. Well, that's how it is.

RACHEL. (*Carefully.*) Monique, did he hurt you? / Did he put his hands –

MONIQUE. Oh no! No! That ain't – No. God no. You know Reggie. He a good man.

RACHEL. Is he?

MONIQUE. You *know* he is! He just don't... He *real* good, Rach. I mean, I seen that man do...extraordinary thangs over his whole life.

RACHEL. His *whole life*? Neekie, he's twenty-six years old! Ain't no *whole* yet.

MONIQUE. He just like tah be big. You know *man-ish* 'n all that shit.

(**SAM** bursts from the kitchen. She has wrapped up whatever food she was given and folded it into her dress to carry. **NADIMA** trails her eating an English muffin Monique's coffee in hand.)

SAM. (*Still hot.*) I could eat outside? (*Checks her attitude. Studies her feet.*) Aunt Dima said to ask if I could eat outside onna stairs.

(**MONIQUE**, knowing she's lost this battle, stares at **SAM**.)

RACHEL. Um...sure, baby. If that's alright with –

SAM. (*Head down.*) I just wanna...see stuff.

MONIQUE. (*Reaching down to touch **SAM**'s face.*) You stay right out dey on them steps where we can see ya.

(SAM doesn't return MONIQUE's gaze. Pulls away sharply. RACHEL and NADIMA clock the tension. NADIMA opens the door for SAM to exit. Glances at her from the window. Hands MONIQUE her coffee.)

What you gave her?

NADIMA. She didn't want much. Cheese and crackers.

MONIQUE. Well...dat's her. Picky eater.

NADIMA. Hm. Trip that long with a picky eater?

MONIQUE. *(Narrowing her eyes.)* I feeds my child, Nadima.

NADIMA. I didn't say / you don't.

MONIQUE. Stopped 'n got her somethin' fo' we left *and* in Tennessee so –

RACHEL. Whoa whoa whoa. Tennessee?

NADIMA. The hell kinda route did you take?!

RACHEL. *(Incredulous.)* The long way.

MONIQUE. That's the long way?

RACHEL. Girl!

MONIQUE. Musta got bad directions.

NADIMA. You could have just gone online –

MONIQUE. Well, maybe some people ain't got no computer. You ever thought about that? I went old school. Rand McNally okay.

NADIMA. Fine. Fine.

(She sips her coffee. Bites her muffin.)

So, what's the deal?

RACHEL. We were just / getting to that.

MONIQUE. I know. I know. I jus' come up here 'n -. Oh, man! Y'all gotta be tah work?

NADIMA. That's the usual / chain of events.

RACHEL. I can cancel my class -

MONIQUE. (*Apologetically.*) Aw naw. I jus' bus' up y'all's / situation.

NADIMA. I can't hang around too much longer. Inspector's coming to see the property.

MONIQUE. Y'all, I'm sorry. / I shouldna come bustin' in...

RACHEL. Just. Relax okay. Nadima, don't you need to get ready?

NADIMA. Yep. (*Takes a quick bite of her English muffin.*) So?

MONIQUE. What?

NADIMA. Are you uh, just here for the day? Dropping by to say hello?

RACHEL. (*Grins. Shakes her head.*) Nadima.

NADIMA. Have you reserved a room at the Marriott for the evening?

RACHEL. Stop it, / baby.

MONIQUE. I'm tired, okay. I been on the road all night. You could at least *act* like you happy tah see me.

NADIMA. See, I'm not quite sure if I am just yet.

RACHEL. Nadima!

MONIQUE. Huh! Thanks for the coffee.

RACHEL. Nadima, go shit 'n shower please. I'm gonna sit here and listen to what my little sister has to say.

MONIQUE. Yeah, I'm tryna have a private conversation / wit' my sister!

NADIMA. A private conversation? In my house?

MONIQUE. Oh, you the only one stay here?

RACHEL. Honey, please you're / gonna have to –

MONIQUE. You picked a *choice* one / sis, ya hear me!

NADIMA. Disrespect me one more / time –

RACHEL. Okay, ladies that's enough! You've said your hellos. Now, Sam is out there. I'm sure she can hear just about everything. And we don't need Mrs. Anderson coming down talking about her "concerns." So please.

(The ladies cease fire.)

NADIMA. Okay. Okay. Come here.

(She takes RACHEL aside. Holds her around the waist with one arm. Looks her in the eye.)

Take care of this.

(Presses her hand on RACHEL's heart.)

Take care of this.

(Presses her hand on RACHEL's head. Kisses it.)

RACHEL. I will.

(RACHEL taps her fingers to her own lips.)

Take care of *this*.

NADIMA. With pleasure.

(They kiss. They smile. A bit of their lovers' routine.)

Good morning. I'll be right in there if you need me.
Love you.

RACHEL. Love you too.

(**NADIMA** *exits to the bedroom.*)

RACHEL. (To **MONIQUE.**) I'm sorry about –

MONIQUE. Don't apologize fah her! That chick is outta her goddamn min'. Seriously, *that's* the one ya end up wit', hunh?

RACHEL. Watch it alright.

MONIQUE. Lord knows why you want to be with a woman in the first place. / That right they is some –

RACHEL. Reggie lost his job...

MONIQUE. Hunh? Right! He was tryna find work –

RACHEL. And he left you and the kid.

(**MONIQUE** *nods.*)

What *are* you gonna do?

MONIQUE. Hunh?

RACHEL. To be clear; I was apologizing not for *what* my girlfriend said but for *how* she said it. She's justified.

(*Beat.*)

Now, Neekie, I have had your back on some deep-ass shit. Some *crazy-ass* shit. Okay? And I wake up today and you got *Sam* up here with you. Half a story in your hand. You have to give me *something*.

(*Beat.* **MONIQUE** *starts to cry.* **RACHEL** *embraces her sister.*)

MONIQUE. I done messed up... I been messin' up fah a minute, ya know. An' it cost me. It come tah a head.

(**MONIQUE** *releases from the hug. She walks around the room. Collecting her stories from the walls it seems.*)

I jus'... I jus' figured he needed a lil breathin' room tah clear his head 'a somethin'. Dealin' wit' so much bein' laid-off 'n everythang. He'd been hangin' out at The Blue Room. And I'm sittin' home. Phone ain't rangin'. But then it was a night, then a day, a week 'n I still ain't heard from 'im.

RACHEL. He went out one night and never came back? You call the cops? Ask his friends?

MONIQUE. Ain't no cops in southern Georgia concerned about a missin' nigga now come on. Ain't nobody see'd nor heard from 'im. 'Course I asked around. People shut they door in my face. I'm *that* woman, ya know. Embarrasin'. I don't know...

(As she paces she happens upon a small picture in her pocket. Turns it over. Examines it. Shifts.)

...then I found *this* in his...in his pants pocket.

(Handing over a picture of an attractive woman.)

RACHEL. No, Reggie, no...

MONIQUE. D'ere's a uh number on the back.

RACHEL. You called it?

MONIQUE. I jus' listened to her sayin' "hello" over 'n over again. Keeping time to her breath. Like it was damn near makin' a song. He left wit' what he had on his back 'n nothin' else...to be wit' her. That's his daughter out dey, Rach! I'm s'pose tah be his *wife*. I wake up 'n seen all his clothes hangin' 'ney next tah mine in the closet. His shoes lined up jus' so. Nothin' ever out 'a order. Nothin' ever out 'a place. His smell – everywhere. I love it. Love the way it fills up a room. The way it fills me up. But every moment since I found that picture – called that number –

RACHEL. Jesus Christ, Neekie, this is a Jersey number! You did NOT come up here to – You have GOT to be kidding me.

MONIQUE. You thank she pretty? Pretty enough tah leave home fah?

RACHEL. Neekie...?

MONIQUE. Okay. Okay. Listen tah me! Listen tah me please. I'm not stayin'. We jus' need a place tah crash fah a coupla nights til I figure some stuff out. That's it. I ain't askin' fah no money this time. Just...a place tah stay a coupla nights.

RACHEL. You just gonna make trouble for yourself, Neekie. And I don't want to be pulled into no mess / over this.

MONIQUE. Ain't no mess! Ain't no mess, Rachel. Promise.

RACHEL. Baby, if he's *here* with this...this *woman* / there's bound to be –

MONIQUE. You know my baby can't sleep? She loses her breath. Don't speak hardly since her daddy lef' her! Them two? They was in lock-step, man. Me 'n her? We kinda...well, she ain't close tah *me* like she been wit' *him*, ya know. So, she don't tell me much. But that little girl done gone through some hell.

(*Beat.*)

On the ride up sure, ya know, all I could thank about was what that woman's face must look like outside 'a that picture. Who she is. Her body –

RACHEL. Jesus...

MONIQUE. But, ya know, I'm *this* close tah seein' this woman's face –

RACHEL. Neekie –

MONIQUE. I'm this close –

RACHEL. Neekie –

MONIQUE. I'm this close 'n nah I really don't think I can do it is what I'm tryna tell ya!! I don't know if I even *want to* anymo'. I jus' need – tah feel – “okay.” Safe. Just fah a lil while. Please? Look, the man is gone! I *want* him gone. I want him gone from me. Ain't no need lookin' for somebody don't want to be found. Right? (*Forcefully.*) Right?

RACHEL. Sure but –

MONIQUE. Ain't worth the search. I ain't looking. You ain't looking. Ain't nobody lookin' for Reggie.

RACHEL. (*Reluctantly agrees.*) Ain't nobody looking.

MONIQUE. Jus' a coupla nights?

(*Beat.*)

RACHEL. We can set up a place for you in the office and Sam can stay out here and sleep on the couch I s'pose.

MONIQUE. It'll jus' be fah a lil while, Rach. Promise.

RACHEL. Don't worry 'bout it.

MONIQUE. Thank you, Rachel. Shouldn't you consult ya better half?

RACHEL. What she gon' say? You here. And contrary to your belief she does have a heart. That beats real blood. And she loves Sam. There's even a little space in there for you too. / You *push* her!

MONIQUE. Mm.

RACHEL. Don't do it while you're here.

MONIQUE. I won't. I promise. It'd jus' be fah a lil while.

RACHEL. However long you need.

MONIQUE. It'd be good fah Sam tah be away from Vixten fah a minute too.

RACHEL. God. Poor baby.

MONIQUE. She'll be fine.

(Crosses to the window to peek at SAM.)

This'll be good. This'll be real good fah her. An' she can catch up wit' her favorite auntie!

RACHEL. Her *only* auntie. Yeah, I'd like that too.

MONIQUE. An' *we* can catch up?

RACHEL. Mm hm.

MONIQUE. An' you right. I ain't gonna push Dima.

(Beat.)

Oh, see nah I hate I had to come up here like this. I wish it could have been fah like ya birthday or Christmas or somethin'.

RACHEL. You come whenever you need to, baby.

MONIQUE. Ohhh, girl!

RACHEL. What?

MONIQUE. THAT'S what we fidnah' do! I'm 'bout make that kitchen sang a lil bit. Can I do that fah ya? Can I make you a Christmas dinner?

RACHEL. You're insane.

MONIQUE. Imma go to the store, come back 'n cook us up a big ole Vixten style meal! How do a pot roast, collard greens, black-eyed peas, rice, cornbread, 'n peach cobbler sound?

RACHEL. *(She holds up her hands in Hallelujah praise. Whispering.)* Better than quinoa.

MONIQUE. Ken who?

(They laugh.)

Rach, Thank you.

RACHEL. Yeah, well, don't thank me yet...

Scene Two

(Brooklyn. Same day. Just outside the brownstone. SAM sits on the stoop. She takes the crackers from the fold of her dress, crushes them tightly in the palm of her hand then studies the crumbs as she allows them to escape through her fingertips. As she does, in the distance, lights slowly rise on the GRAVEDIGGER. He sits just as she does. Then...)

REGGIE. *(Sings brightly.)*

Oh, this little piggy say I wan' some corn...

(She runs to him gleefully. Laughing. And suddenly lights are fully up on father and daughter in Vixten, Georgia. The recent past.)

Get on up here, baby girl!

(SAM sits on REGGIE's knee. He holds her by the back of her shirt. As he bounces her, she clumsily dips from side to side. She laughs wildly.)

(Sings.)

Oh, this little piggy say I wan' some corn

Danky danky dank

Dank dank

I don't know where to get it from

Danky danky dank

Dank dank

Say, this little piggy say I wan' some corn nah

Danky danky dank

Dank dank

I don't know where to get it from

Danky danky dank

Dank dank

Danky danky dank

Dank dank

Ha. See, you like that right d'ere hunh?

(He lifts her off of his knee. Massages his thigh.)

You gettin' so big. You gettin' too big fah me tah put you on my knee, girl.

SAM. That ain't true!

REGGIE. It is too.

SAM. Who say I'm big?

REGGIE. 'Cording to my leg 'n my back, baby girl.

SAM. Yesterday, I put my whole self in the dryer 'n I spun on the inside of it. If I can fit in a dryer I can fit on yo knee. So 'dey!

REGGIE. "So d'ere" hunh?

SAM. Yeah.

REGGIE. Well, I guess you tol' me!

SAM. I sho did. I ain't too big.

REGGIE. See 'dey, you just bidin' ya time. You is big, Sam.

(Beat.)

Come here, lemme talk tah ya serious. *(Serious business.)* You got 'bout couple more years fah ya gonna start gettin' a lil height on ya. Start worryin' 'bout ya hair 'n clothes 'n ya gonna start... well, ya gonna start growin' them thangs up top d'ere...

SAM. Tittiebones?

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