

Acting Edition

the ripple, the wave that carried me home

by Christina Anderson

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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the ripple, the wave that carried me home was originally commissioned and produced by Berkeley Repertory Theatre in association with the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Developed with support from The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Berkeley, California. The co-production opened on September 14, 2022, at Berkeley Rep and ran through October 16, 2022, before transferring to the Goodman Theatre, where it opened on January 23, 2023, and ran through February 12, 2023. It was directed by Jackson Gay, with set design by Todd Rosenthal, costume design by Montana Levi Blanco, hair and wig design by Cookie Jordan, lighting design by Jason Lynch, sound design by Noel Nichols & UptownWorks, movement by Erika Chong Shuch, dramaturgy by Madeleine Oldham. The production stage manager at the Goodman Theatre was Kaitlin Kitzmiller; at Berkeley Rep, Elisa Guthertz. The cast was as follows:

GAYLE/YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK WOMAN	
	Brianna Buckley
JANICE	Christiana Clark
EDWIN	Ronald L. Conner
HELEN	Aneisa Hicks

CHARACTERS

Although Janice and her family appear at various ages throughout the play, the cast should be around the same age as the person playing Janice. Age range of the company ideally should be 30s–40s.

GAYLE – the aunt, Black American woman

JANICE – the daughter, Black American woman

EDWIN – the father, Black American man

HELEN – the mother, Black American woman

YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK WOMAN – late 20s, Black American woman (played by the performer who plays Gayle)

REPORTER, JUROR, CITIZEN – news playing from the television voiced by the actor playing Edwin, understudies, or others

JANICE'S ANSWERING MACHINE – voiced by the performer who plays Edwin or another male voice

HELEN & GAYLE'S ANSWERING MACHINE – voiced by the performer who plays Gayle

SETTING

Beacon, Kansas &

A suburb near a downtown city in Ohio.

TIME

1930s–1992 (the first few days of the LA Riots)

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The pace is swift. Like swimming.

Memory is vigorous; determined. Like swimming.

The storytelling uses every muscle. Like swimming.

Explore Janice's sense of humor. It is present throughout.

The 1992 video footage of the LAPD attacking Rodney King should NOT be shown, projected or played. It is referenced throughout but I do not want the video to be played.

While the play has a fluid relationship with time and age, I've decided to include a timeline on the final page of the script as a reference for the actors. It is my hope the timeline is a thing to consider, not adhere to.

Re: actors playing different ages, it is more important to capture the energy of the age rather than “play” the age. No one should “play” a child in this world. Consider how the eight-year-old version of the adult character exists in the space.

The [=.] symbol is called “chicken feet.” Given the context of the scene, it represents an active moment that transcends words. It can be a gesture, a look, a consideration to say the next line (or the choice to say something different). The duration of the moment should be no longer than a sneeze.

In blackness.

*The phone rings.
Rings.*

The answering machine steps in:

*“You’ve reached Janice and Winston Clifton.
We’re unable to take your call right now.
Leave a message and we’ll get back to you as
soon as we can. Blessings.”*

Beeeeeeep

**A YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK
WOMAN** *speaks:*

YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK WOMAN. Good morning.

My name is Young Chipper Ambitious Black woman.

And I’m calling on behalf of the African-American Recognition Committee in Beacon, Kansas.

Mrs. Clifton, can you give me a call at your earliest convenience?

I have a thrilling proposition to discuss with you.

I can be reached at 621.655.3323.

Blessings to you both, as well!

*(The message ends.
Silence.)*

(Time passes.)

*The phone rings.
Rings.*

The answering machine steps in:

*“You’ve reached Janice and Winston Clifton.
We’re unable to take your call right now.
Leave a message and we’ll get back to you as
soon as we can. Blessings.”*

**Beeeeeeep*.*

*It’s **YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK
WOMAN** again:*

Hello, Mrs. Clifton.

This is Young Chipper Ambitious Black Woman following up in regards to the message I left you last week.

I have not received a response to my initial reach out, so circling back to you again.

She clears her throat.

My apologies I had a bit of a tickle in my throat.

I am hoping to speak with you soon to discuss a celebration slash event I am organizing here in Beacon.

Once again, my number is 621.655.3323.

Thank you...

The message ends.

Time passes.

*The phone rings.
Rings.*

The answering machine steps in:

*"You've reached Janice and Winston Clifton.
We're unable to take your call right now.
Leave a message and we'll get back to you as
soon as we can. Blessings."*

Beeeeeeep

GAYLE *speaks:*

GAYLE. Janice.

Will you please return that Young Black Chipper's call?

I have bumped into her several times out in public.

And each time she lets me know you haven't gotten back to her.

Now, you and I are family.

I will not put your business out in the street.

I have no intention of telling her you prefer to keep your time in Beacon to the obligatory minimum, but Young Chipper is a strain of Black etiquette that will pick and pick until her desired outcome is acquired.

And.

I cannot cuss her out because her family owns the complex we now live in.

So.

You see, I fall into an uncomfortable position the longer you fail to return her call and each time I bump into Black Chipper.

=.=

Please relieve all parties of this strain.

=.=

This is Aunt Gayle, by the way. Thank you.

Goodbye.

The message ends.

Lights up on JANICE, mid 30s.

She holds a glass of water.

She speaks directly to us.

JANICE. In the house I grew up in

I learned to place a glass of water

on my bedside table every night.

In the morning, I'd wake up, sit up in bed,

and down that glass of water as fast as I could.

I hated the taste of water.

I still do.

But we, you and I, each of us are sixty percent water –
give or take a few percentages. You and I need it. In a
way, we are it – water.

“One can say each of us – every man, woman, and small
child – is a small river...”

My family, my ancestry, is a tree of small rivers.

Roots filled with lakes of memory.

So while I grew up in a landlocked environment the
family was an ocean.

=.=

I sit on that lone branch that yearns for the sturdiness
of land.

I don't like water.

I hate the way it feels against my skin.

The way it soaks my hair, splashes against my scalp.

I am sixty percent water.

=.=

=.=

It is morning.

She drinks the glass of water.

A workday, a school day in the middle of March.

1992.

Winston is downstairs making breakfast for the boys.

I am upstairs in the shower worrying about what needs to be tackled at the office. I run all administrative responsibilities for alumni relations at a small college in Ohio. The institution has a reputation of a decent science school. Many of the students go on to be dentists, podiatrists, and optometrists. I facilitate reunion committees, ask campaigns, and help design “enthusiasm packages.”

My job is basically, reminding people to come back and give back.

This year, we have yet to hit our target number of donations. And it doesn't look like we will.

There's a knock at the bathroom door.

It's my youngest: Nate.

He cracks open the door to tell me Young Black Chipper has left another message.

Why does this heifer keep calling me?

And that means another call from Aunt Gayle isn't far behind.

There's an unspoken, longstanding agreement that phone calls with my people in Beacon occur on the following occasions:

- the first and third Sundays of each month
- seven of the ten government holidays

- immediate family birthdays
- minor surgeries and subsequent periods of healing.

All of Winston's family is based here in Ohio, so I've tucked the boys neatly into that circle.

When the oldest was a baby, we drove to Kansas for a visit.

The youngest has never been.

We rarely spend time in Beacon.

I've always made arrangements for my parents to visit us in Ohio.

When my daddy died a few years ago, I chose to go alone to the funeral. Winston didn't agree with that choice, but he respected it.

I married him for several reasons: love, his beauty, strength, tenderness, and the fact that he trusted I knew what was best when it came to my side of the family.

=.=

Water is a complicated element.

It heals, destroys, rescues, erases.

It drowns. It saves.

It holds memory. It washes away pain.

Vacations at the beach now, I sit on the shore. Watch like a tourist as my husband plays with the boys in the ocean. I see their joy but cannot hear it. The wind and rolling waves silence their laughter and squeals.

I look at them, never knowing that joy. I inherited the weight of water. The heaviness, the consequence of it – not the joy.

=.=

March 1956.

There are three public pools in Beacon, Kansas.

Brookside is for the Negroes.

The Gregory Lane and SunRay are not.

The Gregory Lane is the finest swimming experience the city offered white folks.

A tank the length of six Cadillacs, concrete decks, and plush grassy lawns.

SunRay wasn't as nice, but was far from pathetic.

Brookside was located in a Black neighborhood occupied by folks who were referred to as the "Thinking Class."

Thinking Class Blacks meaning middle-class families.

My mama's side of the family lived in this neighborhood.

Years prior the family petitioned the city to build a pool demanding Negroes had just as much right as the white folks to recreate.

To subdue the "evil consequences of integration," the city built Brookside.

It wasn't as nice as SunRay, but it was clean and respectable. A symbol of achievement. My grandfather gave Black children free swim lessons every summer.

It was a time when every young person in Beacon could learn how to swim.

Enter my daddy, Edwin Collen.

*Faint light on **EDWIN** in his mid-30s.*

...whose family was not a part of the Thinking Class.

Daddy lived with the Black folks who didn't have the clout to get anything built, maintained, or even considered.

In his part of Beacon, people could only afford necessities.

No one went to bed hungry, but their circumstance defined their neighborhood –

The Necessity Class.

My grandfather taught all the children in Thinking Class how to swim. And as a gesture of goodwill, he wanted to offer lessons to The Necessities. He got his church, the largest Black church in Beacon, to use its van to transport young Necessity people to Brookside. My grandfather, being a descendant of the church founder, made this possible even when many in the congregation were against it.

This was an example of the clout Mama's family had and how they used it.

Daddy, eight years old, took the van from his neighborhood, rode past The Gregory Lane and SunRay, to learn how to float in Brookside. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, his future father-in-law (my grandfather) taught him how.

My mama Helen at fourteen.

Faint light on HELEN in her mid-30s.

Throughout her teens she studied Latin, ballet, and piano. During swim season, she gave lessons to little kids whose parents didn't know how to swim, or were too afraid of the water.

Light rises fully on HELEN, as she shifts into a teen. She pantomimes a typical lesson.

HELEN. That's it. You're doing fine...

JANICE. Edwin, in his teens, tested the boundaries of authority. He spent most summers daydreaming of

takeovers at The Gregory Lane pool. It was closer to his neighborhood than Brookside.

So close he could hear the water splash and melodies of delight from those who were allowed to enter.

A few times, he rallied friends and walked to the entrance.

Light rises fully on EDWIN, standing at the entrance as a teen. He holds out coins.

EDWIN. There were often five of us. Sometimes only two.

We stood there in our trunks and tees. Polite. Patient.

JANICE. (*Quotes the gatekeeper.*) “No Negroes here. Brookside only.”

HELEN. That’s a good job!

See? I told you: the water is your friend.

Your kicks are so good!

Lights out on HELEN.

JANICE. The Gregory Lane was impenetrable. Fencing around the perimeter and lifeguards who did the double duty of pool security.

With so much effort put into protecting Gregory Lane, it left the SunRay pool vulnerable.

EDWIN, in his 30s, tells a young JANICE the story.
He loves telling this story.

EDWIN. SunRay wouldn’t let us in either.

But it didn’t have as many ways to keep us out.

JANICE. (*To us.*) Just shy of his eighteenth birthday...

EDWIN. (*To JANICE.*) I had memorized the best ways onto the grounds and the fastest way out.

All without being detected.

Even now, you could blindfold me, drop me there in the dead of night, and I could find my way out in record time – no trouble at all.

JANICE. *(To us.)*

EDWIN. *(To JANICE.)*

There were four of 'em...

There were four of us...

EDWIN. *(To JANICE.)* My best friend Franklin.

Your uncle Dougie.

And our cousin Reggie: who was the Sugar Chile
(Rhymes with "smile".) Robinson of swimming.

JANICE. ...I don't know who Sugar Chile is, daddy...

EDWIN. You don't? *(JANICE shakes her head.)*

I never played you his music?

Another head shake from JANICE.

I'll have to change that...

The point is Reggie was a water prodigy.

He was born by a river –

JANICE. Just like Sam Cooke!

EDWIN. *(Can't help but chuckle.)* Well...yea...sorta like Sam Cooke.

But Reggie could swim any current, any temperature, for any distance.

He breathed two elements: air and water.

If Black folks could compete in that part of the Olympics, he'd have a whole house filled with medals and trophies. Stadiums would be named in his honor.

He was super bad. And a solid cat, too.

Back then he was slim and strong and quick. A few years younger than me.

I told him what I wanted to do at SunRay, he was on board just like that.

It was going down.

The four of us snuck in on a hot summer day.

I stood by the way out.

Franklin was by the way in.

And Dougie was at the meeting spot with a dry set of clothes.

Stationed at our marks, Reggie stripped down to his trunks.

Franklin, on the lookout, counted off:

One

Two

Three!

!!!POW!!!

Reggie zoomed straight for that tank of water!

All muscle, power, and revolution!

He stuck to the route I mapped out, so he had a clear shot.

Then: SPLASH!!!

He's in the water!!!

White folks scream and holler.

Women scramble to get out while fellas jump in and try to get a hold of that beautiful, Black Aquaman!

Towels flail. Pool toys tossed in the air.

In the chaos, Reggie stayed on task:

Moves his arms in freestyle swim stroke.

He makes it to the other end of the pool.

He jumps out and jets towards me.

My heart matches his pace.

Angry red faces not far behind, but Poseidon was on our side that day.

He and I jet down a zigzag, juke-style path.

And we got away. They couldn't catch us.

We got away.

EDWIN *is slightly winded.*

*The joy of the memory, mixed with pride,
mixed with adrenaline.*

JANICE. Did you ever get in trouble?

EDWIN. They never found out it was us.

The story made the paper and everything.

But no one snitched.

SunRay got shut down for three whole days.

JANICE. Why?

EDWIN. Sanitization.

A Negro "infected" the water they said.

So the city drained the tank, steam cleaned it, then filled it back up –

The phone in 1992 rings.

Shift. JANICE returns to the present of 1992.

The answering machine steps in:

*"You've reached Janice and Winston Clifton.
We're unable to take your call right now.*

Leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we can. Blessings."

**Beeeeeeep*.*

*It's **YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK WOMAN**, a bit less courteous:*

YOUNG CHIPPER AMBITIOUS BLACK WOMAN. Hello, Mrs. Clifton.

This is Young Chipper Ambitious Black Woman following up...again.

Your Aunt Gayle mentioned how busy you are up there in...Ohio,

but I implore: please find a moment to reach me...

JANICE. Winston is afraid Young Chipper will appear at the front door if I don't return her call.

I plan to contact her from the office – to provide myself an easy out if necessary.

But the days are busy and the evenings are spent helping the boys with homework.

By the time night rolls around –

*Mid 1960s, **HELEN** and **EDWIN** at home after a long day.*

*Husband and wife, both in their 30s. **EDWIN** collapses next to **HELEN**, exhausted.*

EDWIN. I am exhausted.

HELEN. She's asleep?

EDWIN. She's asleep.

Finally.

Took longer than usual.

And that tantrum at dinner...

HELEN. She had a tough day.

EDWIN. It's third grade.

What's tough?

HELEN. She got into a fight.

EDWIN. A fight?

HELEN. It wasn't a big deal.

EDWIN. With who?

HELEN. A boy –

EDWIN. A boy?!

HELEN. They're eight, baby.

It's not like Janice was fighting Ali.

EDWIN. Why didn't you tell me?

HELEN. I'm telling you now.

EDWIN. Helen...

HELEN. I went up to the school. Talked to the principal.

Brought her home. She's frightened more than anything.

She didn't want to disappoint you.

EDWIN. That explains dinner.

And bedtime.

It's been a year since she asked me to read her a story.

Tonight, it was like she didn't want me to leave her side.

What was the fight about?

HELEN. The boy splashed water at Janice's best friend.

The friend cried. Janice told him to apologize.

He wouldn't. They argued. Wrestled.

EDWIN. Wow...

HELEN. Yea...

Our baby's executing
some of that street justice.

EDWIN. I know, right?

She can put that energy into the BT this year.

HELEN. Why would Janice need energy for the BT Remembrance?

EDWIN. Well... I was thinking...this might be a good year for her to get more...involved in the events.

Maybe...say a few words at the opening ceremony.

She could read a poem, or you could write a little speech for her.

HELEN. Baby, I... I don't think that's a good idea.

EDWIN. Why not?

HELEN. She's eight years old.

EDWIN. Old enough to be a vigilante...

HELEN. It's not a joke, Edwin. The first year you want her to speak, she's eight years old.

Janice is the same age as those boys who drowned.

EDWIN. =.=

HELEN. Don't tell me you didn't know that.

EDWIN. I'm not gonna lie. I did.

But that's what makes it so powerful, baby.

We've been hosting this event before Janice was even born.

And we do it to honor the Beacon Three and protest the public pool closures.

This year, our daughter can stand at that microphone to symbolize what our community has lost and remind us what we're fighting for.

=.=

=.=

I'll ask her if she wants to do it.

HELEN. If you ask, she'll do it. For you.

You know that.

EDWIN. I'll be as neutral as possible.

Shift.

JANICE *in the present of 1992.*

To us:

JANICE. Those three boys that drowned? It happened March 1956.

March third to be exact.

There were four of 'em: Two white boys. Two Black.

They were friends and wanted to swim together.

Could they go to Gregory Lane? SunRay? No.

And while Brookside never explicitly said "no whites."

Neither Black boy could recall seeing one there.

One of them remembered a lake on the edge of Beacon.

They set out on foot, à la "Stand by Me."

Eight years old.

But only one came back.

=.=

The others became known as the Beacon Three...

=.=

The tragedy was significant on its own, but it charged the fight to end segregated city pools in Beacon.

My parents played a role in persuading Necessity Blacks to unite with Thinking Blacks for the first time in the city's history.

And they got several well-meaning Gregory Lane patrons to join the cause as well.

A year later, 1957, a judge ruled all tanks open to anyone who had money to pay.

As soon as his gavel smacked against the bench confirming his decision, mobs gathered to guard Gregory and SunRay – determined to keep swimming “pure.”

Black children who approached with legal tender in hand were chased away with rocks and sticks.

Teenagers punched.

Men beaten, stabbed.

Even Black folks who walked near the neighborhoods were harassed.

Attacks became common at all three locations.

Attendance dropped.

And in 1958, just as I entered the world, the city shut down all pools.

Swimming became a social and political symbol.

Water turned into denial, rejection.

=.=

Brookside was no more.

The swim program my granddaddy operated for almost fifteen years ended.

With no access many children never learned to swim.

Mama was determined I learn, so when I was a toddler, we began the forty-five-minute weekly drives to the neighboring city that would grant us access to an indoor facility.

HELEN *pantomimes giving young JANICE swim lessons.*

HELEN. That's it, my love. You're doing fine...

See? I told you: the water is your friend...

Return to JANICE in the present 1992.

JANICE. Water was my friend...

=.=

I started speaking at the BT event when I was eight.

My father asked me. I couldn't say no...

EDWIN *appears.*

EDWIN. Baby girl, isn't it sad what happened to those boys?

JANICE. Yes.

EDWIN. Do you think it's important for the community to honor those boys?

JANICE. Yes.

EDWIN. And who's a part of the community?

JANICE. =.=

EDWIN. Me, Mama, Uncle Dougie...who else?

JANICE. People at church.

EDWIN. That's right. Who else...?

JANICE. The Youngs next door.

The Washingtons down the street. Everybody in our neighborhood.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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