

Acting Edition

Pipeline

by Dominique Morisseau

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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www.concordtheatricals.com
www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

UNITED STATES AND CANADA
info@concordtheatricals.com
1-866-979-0447

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PIPELINE was commissioned by Chicago, Illinois's Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director).

PIPELINE received its world premiere on July 15, 2017 at Lincoln Center Theater (André Bishop, Producing Artistic Director, Adam Siegel, Managing Director) in New York, New York. It was directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz with sets by Matt Saunders, costumes by Montana Levi Bianco, lights by Yi Zhao, sound by Justin Ellington, and projections by Hannah Wasileski. The stage manager was Charles M. Turner III. The cast was as follows:

NYA	Karen Pittman
OMARI	Namir Smallwood
JASMINE	Heather Velazquez
XAVIER	Morocco Omari
LAURIE	Tasha Lawrence
DUN	Jamie Lincoln Smith

CHARACTERS

NYA – (mid- to late 30s) Black woman. Single mother. Public high school teacher. Trying to raise her teenage son on her own with much difficulty. A good teacher inspiring her students in a stressed environment. A struggling parent doing her damndest. Strong but burning out. Smoker. Sometimes drinker. Holding together by a thread.

OMARI – (late teens) Black man. Smart and astute. Rage without release. Tender and honest at his core. Something profoundly sensitive amidst the anger. Wrestling with his identity between private school education and being from a so-called urban community. Nya's son.

JASMINE – (late teens) Black or Latina woman. Sensitive and tough. A sharp bite, a soft smile. Profoundly aware of herself and her environment. Attends upstate private school but from a so-called urban environment. In touch with the poetry of her own language.

XAVIER – (mid- to late 30s) Black man. Single father – struggling to connect to his own son. Marketing executive. Wounded relationship with his ex-wife, Nya. Financially stable. Emotionally impoverished. Omari's father.

LAURIE – (50s) White woman. Pistol of a woman. Teaches in public high school and can hold her own against the tough students and the stressed environment. Doesn't bite her tongue. A don't-fuck-with-me chick.

DUN – (early to mid-30s) Black man. Public high school security guard. Fit and optimistic. Charismatic with women. Genuine and thoughtful and trying to be a gentleman in a stressed environment. It's not easy.

SETTING

Not necessarily NYC, but definitely modeled after it. Can be any inner city environment where the public school system is under duress. However, the quick pace of the language is NYC-inspired and should be maintained in any setting.

Also, we have Undefined Space. This is a place where location doesn't matter. It is sometimes an alternate reality bleeding into reality. It is sometimes just isolated reality that doesn't require a setting. Only words.

TIME

Present day.

NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT

A slash (/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

This play is for my mother, a master educator, and proud public school teacher for 40 years in Highland Park, MI.

This isn't her story. It's just a similar world in which she was a fiercely committed educator, and worked very hard to help her students transcend. I salute you, Mama.

Love, Dominique ☺

ONE

*(Lights up on **NYA**. She is on the phone, though we don't have to really see her holding anything. She is living the call.)*

(As she speaks, images flow behind her: camera phone video clips of school fights, disjointed and perhaps emerging less into video and more into large overwhelming shadows.)

NYA. Hey it's...it's me. I know I shouldn't...but I don't know what else to... We need to talk. It's about our son. He got in a fight. On school grounds. They're going to... they're talking about...they're talking kicking him out. They're talking pressing charges. They're going to... I don't know what they're going to... I'm just... *(Beat beat beat.)* I'm exhausted. You know that? Like there is no more helium. I'm sinking. Like there is all this... weight... I can't fight gravity. You know? Like I just can't even fight this pulling down...taking all of my – I don't know. I don't know. I don't even know. *(Beat beat beat beat beat.)*

(Then randomly enthusiastic.) So anyway! Give me a call back when you get a moment. So we can talk. Talk about. Your son. Our son. Us...

...

...

(Long, awkward pause.)

Yep. Okay. Bye.

(Quick pause.)

I um... I also miss you.

(Beat.)

Fuck. I shouldn't have said that. I'm gonna... I should delete that. I'm gonna delete that.

(She pushes a button. We hear the prompt that says, "To erase and rerecord, press three." She presses three. Then, very professionally:)

Hey, Xavier, it's Nya. Calling to talk to you about our son. Give me a call back when you get this. Thanks. Bye.

*(**NYA** stands in silence for a moment. Then lights a cigarette. She leans her head to the side. Puffs.)*

(We hear a school bell ring.)

(The distant sound of a school day starting. Hallways filled with lockers closing and gossip and trampling feet.)

(A public address announcement comes through. It is fast and static:)

PA. *(Offstage.)* Good morning students, welcome to another glorious day at Chadsey High. Please remember to take off your hats. No sagging allowed. New policy in effect today – homeroom teachers are now going to lock your cell phones and other non-school-issued devices in their drawers. You will retrieve them at the end of the day. If you have any objections to this, then you are free to leave your devices at home. If you are caught with any non-approved electronic device in class, this is an automatic suspension. No exceptions. I repeat *(Loudly.)* NO EXCEPTIONS! Please do not have your mamas coming up here demanding to get your smart phones back. We have the city government behind us. You cannot win. I repeat *(Loudly.)* YOU CANNOT WIN! Also, there is a pep rally today after school. Be sure to attend and show your school pride. And finally, have a glorious day, students. *(Loudly.)* A GLORIOUS DAY!

(NYA puts her cigarette out on her shoe. Waves the smoke out the window. Then she moves toward a door and opens it.)

NYA. Mornin', class. Pull out your pens. Pop quiz today.

(Groans and sucking teeth are heard. The shadows become harsh fluorescent lights. They bleach us into blindness.)

TWO

(A girl's dormitory. Bedroom.)

(JASMINE and OMARI.)

JASMINE. Tell me you wasn't lookin' at her.

OMARI. I wasn't lookin' at her.

JASMINE. Oughta cut her face.

OMARI. I wasn't lookin' at her.

JASMINE. Thinkin' she's so cute.

OMARI. I wasn't lookin' at her.

JASMINE. She ain't that cute.

OMARI. I was kinda lookin' at her.

JASMINE. What?

OMARI. Just like a little bit.

JASMINE. What's a little bit?

OMARI. Like modestly. With no intention. Just observing.

JASMINE. What you got to be observing for?

OMARI. To take in my surroundings. Learn the world. Not be just tied up in my own existence and nothin' else.

JASMINE. Everything's more important to you than me.

OMARI. You important to me.

JASMINE. Not hardly. You just biding your time. Till you figure out what to do next. Ain't that it?

OMARI. Why would you say that?

JASMINE. Cuz I don't like to talk at nothin'. I like to say exactly what's what.

OMARI. You wanna know what's what?

JASMINE. Yeah. I wanna know.

OMARI. I don't know where I'm gonna be two days from now. Or two hours. And I can't be pretending we in some fairy-tale fantasy where all I need to do is chill with you in a castle with our horses or whatever.

JASMINE. Horses?

OMARI. Or whatever. I'ono. Whatever they got in castles. Truth is I got too many worries and bein' with you don't make 'em go nowhere. You feel me?

JASMINE. You sayin' I'm addin' to your stress level?

OMARI. I'm sayin' I got stresses. Real ones. And hiding out in your dorm ain't doin' nothin' but prolonging the inevitable.

JASMINE. This some wack version of a breakup?

OMARI. It's just me bein' honest.

JASMINE. Well fuck your honesty. Seriously, Omari, you gonna make my heart explode with all yo' back-and-forthness. One minute you tellin' me I'm the cure. Next minute, I'm the cause. Maybe you your own stress problem and I ain't got nothin' to do with it.

OMARI. Maybe I am.

JASMINE. (*Pssshhh.*) Fuck you.

OMARI. Maybe I'm confused.

JASMINE. That's the realest shit you ever said.

(*He tugs at her needfully.*)

OMARI. Yo, this could be our last time.

(*She snatches away.*)

JASMINE. You kiddin' me right now?

OMARI. I'm just seeking intimacy.

JASMINE. You seeking to get socked in the eye. I don't turn on and off like no stove.

OMARI. You mean a faucet.

JASMINE. I mean a stove. One minute you got me hot. Next minute fire's out. Quit gassin' me up and killing my fucking spark.

OMARI. Can't nothing kill your spark. You always gon' be fire.

JASMINE. And you always gon' be crazy.

(*Beat.*)

OMARI. (*Truth.*) I'm scared.

(JASMINE looks at him and wants to say something. Then decides against it. She just looks at him with concern.)

JASMINE. Why you fight him, O?

OMARI. Why you say you gonna cut Keely's face?

JASMINE. She thinks she's cute.

OMARI. So you wanna mess that up?

JASMINE. Maybe it would make things balanced.

OMARI. Like what?

JASMINE. Like she wear on the outside what I feel on the inside.

OMARI. That's messed up.

JASMINE. So I'm messed up. *(Beat.)* Your moms knows?

OMARI. She probably already planning her speech. Threatening to send me to my pops. But dude wouldn't go for that in a million years.

JASMINE. You ain't supposed to even be here right now. If anybody finds us –

OMARI. Where else can we meet? They won't let me talk to you anywhere on the campus. Supposed to be packing my stuff to go home. Ain't like I could visit you back at your folks' crib. They won't let me nowhere near you.

JASMINE. Teen pregnancy stats got 'em spooked. They have no idea who or what I am.

OMARI. I know what you are.

JASMINE. You don't even know yourself. How you know me?

OMARI. I know you.

JASMINE. What you know?

OMARI. You're a metamorphic rock.

JASMINE. Here you go.

OMARI. What?

JASMINE. Science references from Mr. Peterson's class ain't gonna save you from my wrath.

OMARI. Not trying to get saved. Just makin' an observation.

JASMINE. Explain.

OMARI. Metamorphic rocks. They change in form. Made from heat and pressure. That's what makes 'em so rare and interesting.

JASMINE. And that's me?

OMARI. That's you.

(JASMINE considers this.)

JASMINE. I think I'm in love with you.

OMARI. I think I'm leaving.

JASMINE. Where you goin'?

OMARI. Somewhere else. I got some money saved. Child support stash from the ol' man. Shit adds up when you don't spend it.

JASMINE. You gonna just run from your problems?

OMARI. What else I'm gonna do? Stay and let 'em take away my life? My future?

JASMINE. Maybe not.

OMARI. They recorded it.

JASMINE. So threaten anybody who put it up.

OMARI. I'll never be able to trace it. If it goes viral, I'm a wrap. And it's gonna go viral.

JASMINE. Fuck it then. You'll be a celebrity.

OMARI. I'll be public enemy number one.

JASMINE. You won't.

OMARI. I'll be a monster.

JASMINE. You'll be that motherfucker nobody'll fuck with.

OMARI. That ain't the legacy I was trying to leave.

JASMINE. What legacy you gonna leave now? Runnin' away?

OMARI. I just gotta go, Jasmine.

(Pause.)

(They look at each other. JASMINE's eyes well up.)

JASMINE. I know what you are.

OMARI. What am I?

JASMINE. A lunar eclipse.

OMARI. How's that?

JASMINE. Rare and hiding in the shadows of the earth.
Always ready for an escape.

OMARI. Mr. Peterson's science class is the best.

JASMINE. Don't leave.

OMARI. I think I gotta.

JASMINE. I can't survive this prep shit without you.

OMARI. You can survive anything.

JASMINE. Don't leave.

OMARI. Can I kiss you one last time?

JASMINE. Make it last forever.

(He kisses her. It lasts an eternity.)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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