

Acting Edition

Bad Kreyòl

by Dominique Morisseau

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BAD KREYÒL was originally co-produced by Signature Theatre (Beth Whitaker, Interim Artistic Director; Timothy J. McClimon, Executive Director) and Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Chris Jennings, Executive Director), and premiered at Signature Theatre in New York City on October 8, 2024. The production was directed by Tiffany Nichole Greene, with scenic design by Jason Sherwood, costume design by Haydee Zelideth, lighting design by Alan C. Edwards, and sound design by Curtis Craig and Jimmy Keys. The production stage manager was Mars Wolfe. The cast was as follows:

SIMONE..... Kelly McCreary
GIGI Pascale Armand
PITA Jude Tibeau
LOVELIE..... Fedna Jacquet
THOMAS.....Andy Lucien

CHARACTERS

SIMONE – [*pronounced See'MOAN*] – Haitian American woman, NO ACCENT, mid thirties, freethinking, smart, social justice obsessed, and a bit wayward. Her heart is in the right place, but she can sometimes miss the mark with her intentions. She is Haitian by blood, but very Black American from-the-burbs by culture. She wants to be down for her people, but also feels disconnected from them. She is often the butt of other folks' jokes, especially her cousin Gigi, and as such has learned how to be neutral and not take herself too seriously. Somewhere deep inside is a broken bird looking for restoration.

GIGI – [*pronounced Zhee'ZHEE*] – Haitian woman, ACCENT NEEDED, late thirties, bourgeois, intelligent, proud, and bossy. She works in international trading and is oftentimes in sheer business mode. She takes herself too seriously and, unlike Simone, does not have the ease with which to laugh at herself. She is Haitian-born with American exposure and influence. Her clipped nature can seem rude, but to Gigi, this is just who people are. Somewhere deep inside is a loving bird that refuses to be vulnerable at all costs.

PITA – [*pronounced Pee'TAH*] – Haitian man, ACCENT NEEDED, mid thirties, vibrant, full of spirit, and easy to love. He identifies with Haiti's Queer community, but is not yet openly a part of it. He loves life and loves Haiti in all of its beautiful contradictions and is proud of his upbringing and survival story. He is also the housekeeping help for Gigi, though he would never be reduced to being anyone's "maid." In Haiti, this role is far more complicated, and Pita will remind you of that. Somewhere, his revolution is waiting for him.

LOVELIE – [*pronounced Low'VLEE*] – Haitian woman, ACCENT NEEDED, late twenties/early thirties, quiet, strong, mysterious. She is a former prostitute turned seamstress and is seeking her independence. She is no victim. She is the picture of defiant resilience.

THOMAS – [*pronounced Toe'MAS*] – Haitian American man, ACCENT NEEDED, late thirties/early forties, affluent, bourgeois, and impersonal. He is an international trade businessman and embodies all of the tropes of foreign executive power, a shark nature where self-preservation trumps all.

PLACE

Port-au-Prince, Haiti. A well-decorated island boutique.

Outside the boutique.

A workshop factory.

A park.

TIME

Present day

(post-2010 and 2021 earthquakes, and – hopefully not, but –
any future earthquakes as well).

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

"To love a people is to learn their language." I heard a friend say this years ago and it has stuck with me ever since. He was talking about generations talking to each other across varied experiences. It can also refer to learning pronouns and other identity indicators that make people feel respected. For me, I immediately thought about Kreyòl.

I didn't grow up speaking it. I grew up speaking some French and hearing French spoken in my home on occasion when my father's side of the family would visit. It was spoken over, in, and around me. But when it was spoken "to" me, I went mute. I didn't have a community to practice with. I grew up in Detroit where Haitian identity was minimal. In the '90s, if my classmates knew anything about Haiti at all, it was nothing but negativity. Poor. Violent. Dirty.

What is ironic is that those same descriptions were given to me about Detroit whenever I'd venture beyond city zones.

The connection between Detroit and Haiti is great to me. One Black city. One Black country. Both independent in mind, body, and politic. Both ostracized from the rest of the largely white and affluent neighbors. Both punished by the statewide and global powers for their Black independent radical liberation.

When I went to visit Haiti for the first time since my childhood, I was accompanied by my father, brother, and husband. I was determined to learn Kreyòl, even if just a little bit. I still only know a small bit. I still read and write it better than I speak or hear it. But I am clear that I love these people. So I will not tell them to change. I will not reject it when the words don't fit in my mouth. I will not dismiss it. I will keep trying to understand. Because I have learned that language is not only love, but it is an act of liberation.

Kreyòl is anti-colonialism as a language. It resists the oppressor's tongue. It is not broken French. It is a language of resistance and freedom. So though I speak "bad Kreyòl," there is only good that can come from allowing a people the dignity to choose their own master tongue.

For my father Frantz. My Uncle Eddie. My grandmother Mima. My Tante Liz. My Uncle Thèò. And my grandfather Dumont. Thank you for your bloodline of revolution, power, and liberation.

peaceandlovedominique:)

1. 1.

(An island boutique. Clothes of various styles put together on racks. An eclectic taste with touches of very American style. Blue jeans. Shorts. Swimsuits. Some scarves. Sarongs. Beach towels. Handbags. Jewelry.)

(A big Haitian flag hangs somewhere proudly on the wall. A framed photo of Haitian currency – the goud. Various paintings of Haitian art on the wall – one of them is a proud photo of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Another is a family photo of women.)

*(And then randomly, a picture of Beyoncé and Jay-Z.)**

*(Haitian konpa music plays lightly in the shop.)**

(SIMONE enters the boutique with a suitcase and a jacket in her hand. A little bell over the door rings. She yells back offstage to something/someone we cannot see.)

SIMONE. Give me a second please?

(She pauses. Realizes she isn't being understood. Thinks for a hard second. Then:)

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SIMONE. *(In Kreyòl.) Yon second, souple? (Pause.) Mèsi.*

(SIMONE looks around the boutique. Sees the photo of women. Hm.)

(GIGI enters the space carrying boxes and is completely startled by the sight of SIMONE.)

GIGI. *Méd!*

SIMONE. Hey cuz, I'm here.

GIGI. You sneak up on me, *ou fou?*

SIMONE. The door had a bell.

GIGI. Hah? I cannot hear that bell. It is just for charm.

(GIGI sets down the boxes and looks at SIMONE.)

You've lost weight. Good.

SIMONE. I need some goud. I didn't get to exchange my money before my flight. The driver needs to be paid.

GIGI. You left him outside?

SIMONE. I told him to wait a minute. Or a second. I think.

GIGI. Who is your driver? Did they send Armand?

SIMONE. Jeto.

GIGI. Uck, they should have given you Armand. He's cuter.

SIMONE. *Gramere* liked Jeto. Said he was the best driver in Port-au-Prince.

GIGI. *Gramere* said that about everyone. They should've gotten you Armand.

SIMONE. Can you loan me some goud?

GIGI. Go. Put your things on that table. Don't make a clutter. I have a load of shipment coming in today. We are taking inventory. I will pay Jeto.

(GIGI steps out. SIMONE looks around again. A fish out of water. She puts her bags on a side table. Pulls off a scarf. Her hair is wild and free. Maybe in an afro. She picks at it. Looks around the shop. Fingers some dresses and scarves. GIGI re-enters.)

That man is so rude. Next time Armand.

SIMONE. He seemed nice enough to me.

GIGI. You probably couldn't read his tone. What you think is quiet and cooperative is really defiance and judgment. You've got to spend more time around Haitians. You'll understand.

SIMONE. *(Shrugs.)* I thought he was cool.

GIGI. Let me see you cousin. Look at you.

(GIGI stares at SIMONE.)

You need a perm. I can give you one.

(SIMONE touches her hair self-consciously.)

SIMONE. This is how I wear it now.

GIGI. *(Genuinely surprised.)* On purpose?

SIMONE. Going natural. It's not a big deal anymore.

GIGI. Beyoncé's daughter is natural. Blue Ivy.

SIMONE. Right.

GIGI. You are not Beyoncé's daughter.

SIMONE. Thank you for that Gigi. You are correct.

GIGI. Okay.

(An awkward moment.)

I will have Pita get your things and take them to your room.

SIMONE. It's okay. Just tell me where to go and I'll take them myself.

GIGI. No, Pita will do it. Don't be proud. It's how he makes a living.

SIMONE. I'm not proud. I just...the whole servant thing is kinda weird.

GIGI. Oh Jesus, servant thing? You just got here. It's too fast to be stuck up. Wait a week at least.

(GIGI calls out to somewhere we cannot see.)

Pita, my cousin Simone is here! Please grab her bags while we get tea. *(She turns to SIMONE.)* It's not slavery. Pita is paid well. He is *fanmi*. This is a good thing.

SIMONE. Yeah, okay. I'm not gonna argue right now.

GIGI. For once. Thank God. *(She calls again, louder.)* Pita!!!

(PITA, fabulously adorned in scarves and bracelets galore, enters the boutique room from a back room closed off by a curtain. He carries boxes as well.)

PITA. Gigi, *Ban m zòrèy mwen pitit!* I can hear you already without your volume on ten girl!

GIGI. You were taking too long.

PITA. These boxes are heavy, ma *cherie*! My body is fragile *et pitit!* I take my time not to pull one of these very fine muscles.

(He sets the boxes down on a counter and takes a look at SIMONE.)

Cute, *cousine*. Very cute.

SIMONE. Um, thank you.

GIGI. Pita, you remember my *cousine*, Simone.

PITA. I like your hair. *C'est naturelle.*

GIGI. She rejects a perm.

SIMONE. Hi Pita, good to see you again.

PITA. I feel like it's been ages, *cherie*. Come. Kiss.

(PITA pulls SIMONE to him, kisses her on both cheeks.)

Welcome back.

SIMONE. Thanks. You look good. But different, a little.
Not what I remember.

PITA. I've grown in the all the right places, *vraiment*.

GIGI. His mouth is the same loud thing it's always been.

PITA. You have big plans while you are here?

SIMONE. I wanted to visit a few places. See a few sites.
And connect with a few orgs.

PITA. Orgs?

GIGI. She means NGO. I tell her no NGO. We don't do
NGO here. But she insists.

PITA. Oh *cherie*, those non-government organization
(Pronounced: organ-i-zah-see-on.) are nothing but
wannabes. Come here to take over the beauty of our
island and leave us with the shitty parts. They stick to
themselves like a new tribe, but some of them like to
play in the sand, *konpran*? You don't want to be caught
in their quest for Haitian ass, trust me.

SIMONE. There are some orgs doing good work, here.
I have a few friends who –

PITA. It's okay sweetness. You can't know what you don't
know. We'll be your tour guides.

GIGI. We need you to take her things to her room. We are
going to have tea first.

PITA. Oh God, Gigi, you are so boring. Tea is for *gramoun*.
You are not eighty sister. You are barely –

GIGI. Do NOT go there Pita!

PITA. She's your cousin. She knows you're an old crow.

GIGI. I am twenty-five.

PITA. Multiplied by what?

GIGI. We're having tea so we can sit and talk about family.

SIMONE. Actually, I could really use a shower.

PITA. Oh *cherie*, not during these hours. No water.

SIMONE. Oh.

GIGI. Simone is going to be shell-shocked in less than two hours, I promise.

(**GIGI** laughs with **PITA**.)

SIMONE. I'm not... I just forgot. About the water situation.

GIGI. Simone hasn't been back to her motherland since she was...

SIMONE. Twelve.

PITA. Oh, you are *tres nouveau*.

GIGI. I've gone with *Gramere* to the states to visit many times. But it does not happen in the reverse much –

SIMONE. It was complicated. With my mother's health.
And then later, my dad –

GIGI. Everyone in the family caught one cancer or another.
Then heart disease finished off the rest. We are both orphans now. Unified.

SIMONE. Um. Yeah, okay, sure...

PITA. We are glad you made it home *cousine*. There is much to show you. After five, you can wash. And then we hit Hollywood.

SIMONE. Hollywood?

GIGI. Haitian Hollywood. Pita knows everyone.

PITA. And everyone knows Pita. I can get you into the best parties. You dance *konpa*?

SIMONE. Not really, seen it on YouTube though.

PITA. Don't tell anyone that. Tonight, you get fresh and clean, and you learn *konpa*. I will teach you to wake up the ancestors in those hips baby. You are home now!

GIGI. I want to go to Chateau Baker. They have my favorite DJ tonight.

(PITA grabs Simone's bags.)

PITA. I'll call my people. *(To SIMONE.)* And for you, mademoiselle, I'll have your quarters chic and magique when you finish your tea.

(He walks off. A beat.)

GIGI. You like *sucre*?

SIMONE. Huh?

GIGI. In your tea?

SIMONE. I dunno. Yeah, maybe.

GIGI. It's waiting for us on the patio.

SIMONE. Kinda hot for tea.

GIGI. I made it for you. So you can be comfortable. Come have it.

SIMONE. I'm so tired. That delay was awful. Seven hours at the airport for a four hour flight and then when I get here I got lost trying to find Jeto. I had to borrow the cell phone from another driver and he walked me through my very bad Kreyòl until I found Jeto.

GIGI. Tea will make it better.

(**SIMONE** stops and looks at the photo of the women on the wall.)

SIMONE. When was this?

GIGI. I don't know. *Gramere's* seventieth birthday or something.

SIMONE. I don't have any pictures of her.

GIGI. I will make you a copy.

SIMONE. I don't know why that is. Like I never collected photos of my grandmother. That's so strange.

GIGI. We have albums. I'll make you one.

(**SIMONE** hesitates.)

SIMONE. It feels kinda weird to be here.

GIGI. Do you remember this shop?

SIMONE. A little bit. It looks different.

GIGI. We upgraded after the earthquakes. Was time to remodel. I've got a good thing going in Miami now. We do lots of trading. And I bring a few things in when I come from Paris. This is not a peasant shop anymore. We are high class.

SIMONE. It looks good. Can hardly tell that it was...

GIGI. Pita helped me put the roof back on. He's good with his hands.

SIMONE. I want to see the old house.

GIGI. *Gramere's*?

SIMONE. Can you take me?

GIGI. It's gone. Nothing there.

SIMONE. I want to see.

GIGI. Listen, don't go trying to drudge up ghosts of earthquakes and hurricanes past. We do not dwell here. We move on.

SIMONE. I haven't said goodbye.

GIGI. Many people haven't. Life does not always let you get the final say. Now let's have tea. Sit down. Look at pictures so you don't embarrass me by not remembering who anyone is. And then after five, you can have a shower.

(GIGI heads to the curtain. Turns to a slow-moving SIMONE.)

I think we can become friends. It isn't so hard. A dying wish of a grandmother must be fulfilled.

SIMONE. We'll do our best. Let's go have tea.

(GIGI smiles. Disappears behind the curtain.)

(SIMONE lingers, one last look around the shop. Here goes nothing...)

1. 2.

*(Nighttime. Crickets and lizards and hot night air. **SIMONE** sits on a crate outside of the boutique, a bottle of whiskey in her hands. She sips and talks into the camera on her phone, occasionally swatting a mosquito.)*

SIMONE. Whiskey. Brought it in my suitcase. Something to take the edge off. Brought all kinds of shit to give away. KIND bars. Raisins. Pop chips. The hungry children at the airport took half of it. Glad some of you told me about that so I could come prepared, but it's still different up close. Especially when it's your own people but they don't see you that way yet. It's like they can smell the newness on me. Even if I didn't say a word, they all still knew. And I'm pretty sure the kids that helped with my luggage tricked me into double tipping them. Definitely not telling my cousin I got swindled on my first day. It's like she gets high on all my lows. I told her I forgot to exchange my money to save myself from her cultural hall of shame. And I'm definitely not showing her my Kreyòl lessons workbook. *(She reads her screen.)* Yeah, it does sound like family dysfunction @kboogie435. Because it is. I thought this was a safe space – no judgment? Anyway, anybody got any tricks for keeping the mosquitos from biting? *(Reads screen again.)* That's not funny @therealjlyons. It's not Zika. I know it's not Zika. *(A beat.)* What are the symptoms again?

*(Suddenly, the sound of feet stepping on a twig. **SIMONE** becomes extremely alert. She sets down her phone and searches for a makeshift weapon.)*

Hello? *(Remembering her Kreyòl.)* Um, Alo? Bon swa?

(**SIMONE** swallows a lump of fear in her throat. A **VOICE** from the darkness whispers:)

VOICE. Krik!

SIMONE. What?

VOICE. I say Krik!

SIMONE. Who's there?

VOICE. Wrong answer!

SIMONE. What?

VOICE. Krak!

SIMONE. Whoever you are, you need to leave now. I have a gun.

PITA. You won't use it.

SIMONE. What? I will.

PITA. Not on someone so good-looking, *n'est pas*?

(**SIMONE** is confused. **PITA** emerges out of the darkness.)

(**SIMONE** catches her breath, relief.)

SIMONE. Pita?

PITA. Where is your gun, *cherie*? Put it away. It has no business here.

SIMONE. I don't have a gun.

(**PITA** looks at her, and realizes her terror. He starts laughing in disbelief.)

PITA. *Poukisa w'ap bay manti*? For why?

SIMONE. Because I was...

PITA. Afraid.

SIMONE. Concerned.

PITA. Of Krik Krak?

SIMONE. I don't know what... I mean it's late and dark...

PITA. You don't remember playing?

SIMONE. Playing?

(SIMONE thinks for a second. Something dawns on her.)

A game?

PITA. I say Krik!

SIMONE. Krak?

PITA. And then I tell you a story, no? It is your childhood.
We used to play.

SIMONE. Riiiiiiight. Shit. Right. So...you usually play it in
the dark when a person's alone and a bit on edge?

PITA. No, that was me being an asshole!

(PITA starts laughing again.)

You shouldn't lie about having a gun, *cherie*. There will
be people who put your bravery to the test!

SIMONE. What else was I supposed to say?

PITA. Scream *Lougawou*!

SIMONE. Is that the word for help? I'm forgetting / my
vocab words.

PITA. It means werewolf. A shapeshifter, *non*? To attack
the soul.

SIMONE. Werewolf?

PITA. You want a Haitian to come to your assistance? You
don't scream "Help, I need assistance!" You scream
"*Lougawou!*" They will pour into the streets, machetes
in hand, ready to whoop that werewolf right back into
the grave! We don't play with matters of the soul, *cherie*.

(**SIMONE** laughs. **PITA** sits on a crate beside her.)

SIMONE. You make things easier.

PITA. By scaring the shit out of you?

SIMONE. By making me laugh at myself.

PITA. What is so hard that you need relief?

(**SIMONE** is quiet for a moment.)

SIMONE. Just. Traveling woes.

PITA. Ah. To be so lucky to travel all over. Tell me the places you've been.

SIMONE. Oh, um... Toronto. Quebec. Still Canada, wait, um... South Africa. England. Scotland. Spain, but that was for an independent study. Spent the whole time inside of hotel lectures so I don't feel like I can count that.

PITA. And not here until now?

SIMONE. Yeah.

PITA. I've always wanted to go to Brazil. I have met people from there. We feel like the same.

SIMONE. Seems like somewhere you'd fit really easy.

PITA. You think so darling?

SIMONE. I would guess.

(**SIMONE's** eyes pierce through **PITA**.)

PITA. What? *Sa w'ap gade la?* You are staring, *zanmi' m.*

SIMONE. Sorry, I...

PITA. You have questions.

SIMONE. You're just different than how we grew up. So... free.

PITA. It's an illusion, darling. I am shackled in more ways than one. But inside, my spirit is an eagle. I am always soaring on the inside.

SIMONE. I would think it would be hard. Here. To be. You.

PITA. Ayiti is my true love. There is no easy place to be me. I am here because it is my land, *konpran*? You cannot escape your blood. You cannot run away from who you are.

(**SIMONE** is silent again. This resonates.)

You are so worried about me and my freedom. I think you want to know things that I have the answer to.

SIMONE. Um, we speaking in riddles now?

PITA. Do you want to go with me?

SIMONE. Is this the party thing? Cuz I told Gigi I was out of it tonight.

PITA. You lie to Gigi.

SIMONE. Not really.

PITA. Yes, really. You are not just tired or *fatigue*. You are avoiding.

SIMONE. Do you also read palms?

PITA. Palms are liars. I read eyes and souls, *cherie*. Much faster way to the truth. And you are avoiding. Your *cousine*, she is much for the handling. But she wants you here. You should've seen her making a fuss, "Pita, where are the towels? Pita, these are not the sheets I set out! Pita, did you remember to get tea and honey from the *maché*?" She gave me gas with all her annoyances.

SIMONE. And you guys are...friends?

PITA. Since childhood. You don't remember?

SIMONE. I remember things a little differently.

PITA. Things got ugly during the reign of the Baby Fat One, you know? The dictator's dictator son. My uncles were all henchmen for him. He had my entire family in his clutch. If not for your *famni*...for allowing my parents to send me here as *ti moun*, raise me to study and work, there is no telling what fate I would suffer. They were a torturous regime. I grew up here. Got education. Got work. Got spared.

SIMONE. I never knew that story.

PITA. *Wi, se vre.* Gigi and I are like old married couple without the burdens of sex. I don't think Gigi's legs have had a good shaking since the earthquake.

SIMONE. Oh God. That is a complicated thought.

PITA. But don't tell her I said that. She pretends to be iron but she is really soft like cotton sheets. She shrinks easily.

SIMONE. That's not the Gigi I know.

PITA. Why did you come here? *Pale cho.* Is it to find *lamour*? Is this your, what do they say...eat love pray?

SIMONE. I don't know. I came here for lots of reasons. To visit. To work. To –

PITA. Work? No one takes holiday to work. What is this – self-punishment?

SIMONE. I don't want to tell you. You already judged me.

PITA. Ah. You mean with NGO.

SIMONE. I want to do some service work. I'm not here to sit on my ass and drink tea and gossip. I came to get my hands dirty.

PITA. If this is your wish, sister, you don't have to look far. The country is your oyster.

SIMONE. But I'm serious. I can't just insert myself. I need an introduction.

PITA. Inserting oneself into Ayiti's dirt is the American way.

SIMONE. I don't want to be just some tourist in Haiti.

PITA. Okay, *cherie*. Let's make a, how you say, commitment? You come with me to Chateau Baker and let me teach those hips how to rotate the right way, and I will help you find the dirt.

SIMONE. You'll connect me to an organization?

PITA. I know people doing many things for your so-called good. I will make the connection.

(SIMONE reaches out and throws her arms around PITA in an embrace.)

SIMONE. Okay, it's a deal!

PITA. Alright, *cherie*! But listen, you are going to have to change. The peasant look is so last year.

(SIMONE laughs, relieved to finally have a friend here.)

SIMONE. Should we wake Gigi? I know she wanted to go. I sort of shut it down. Now I feel bad.

PITA. Gigi is restless. If she sleeps, I say let her. Tonight is just the two of us. Besides, Gigi is too popular. When she is there, I get no attention. Tonight, I have the new Black American girl. I will be a hit!

(PITA grabs SIMONE's arm, and they disappear into the house.)

1. 3.

(Lights up on GIGI. She opens a box and pulls out various dresses, women's shirts and blouses, etc. She begins putting the things on hangers and finding space for them on her racks.)

(SIMONE enters in her PJs, stretching and sipping a cup of coffee.)

SIMONE. *(Coming out of a yawn.)* Bonjou, Gigi.

GIGI. *(Somewhat scornful.)* It is not morning. It is already past noon.

(GIGI moves around SIMONE, grabbing more clothes to put on hangers. She is actively shunning SIMONE.)

SIMONE. It means good day, right? So doesn't really have an expiration...

GIGI. You slept well, I assume?

SIMONE. I slept okay, thanks.

GIGI. You certainly slept in. You look like a piece of offering to the ancestors left out in the sun too long.

SIMONE. Well okay. That's one way to put it.

GIGI. The other way is less kind.

SIMONE. I'm a little hungover. Is that a crime here?

GIGI. Oh no, there is no crime. You can do whatever you like. Why would there be a crime?

SIMONE. I don't know. You just seem a little –

GIGI. I am a working woman. I do not have time to ponder your trifles. I'm meeting a business client to do a trade. I am not worried about your hanging out late and getting drunk and partying with my friends.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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