Acting Edition

The Great Privation (How to flip ten cents into a dollar)

by Nia Akilah Robinson

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE GREAT PRIVATION: HOW TO FLIP TEN CENTS INTO A DOLLAR was first produced by and performed at Theatre503, London, on 14 May 2024. Directed by Kalungi Ssebandeke, set & costume design by Ruth Badila, lighting design by Chuma Emembolu, sound design by José Guillermo Puello, movement direction by Yemurai Zvaraya, stage management by Shereen Hamilton, production management by Adam Jefferys. Produced by Ceri Lothian, Executive Producer Zena Tuitt-Collins, Associate Producer Clarisse Makundul Productions. The cast was as follows:

CHARITY & MODERN-DAY CHARITY. . . . . Christie Fewry
MOTHER (MISSY FREEMAN) & MODERN-DAY MOTHER (MINNIE). . . . . .Sydney Sainté
JOHN & JOHN MODERN DAY. . . . . .Jack Gouldbourne
CUFFEE (JANITOR) & CUFFEE MODERN-DAY. . . . . .Romeo Mika

THE GREAT PRIVATION: HOW TO FLIP TEN CENTS INTO A DOLLAR was produced at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington DC on 11 September 2025. Directed by Mina Morita, scenic design by Meghan Raham, lighting design by Amith Chandrashaker, sound design by Nick Hernandez, costume design by Brandee Mathies, stage management by Sarah Chapin. The cast was as follows:

CHARITY & MODERN-DAY CHARITY. . . . . .Victoria Omoregie
MOTHER (MISSY FREEMAN) & MODERN-DAY MOTHER (MINNIE). . . . . .Yetunde Felix-Ukwu
JOHN & JOHN MODERN DAY. . . . . Zack Powell
CUFFEE (JANITOR) & CUFFEE MODERN-DAY. . . . . Marc Pierre

CHARACTERS

CHARITY & MODERN-DAY CHARITY – She. Her. *Black. 16. Of darker skin tone*. 1832, funny, busy, intense. Modern Day, very hyperactive and bubbly. Slightly hood-whimsical. Has panic attacks, and deals with anxiety.

MOTHER (MISSY FREEMAN) & MODERN-DAY MOTHER (MINNIE) – She. Her. *Black. 34. Six feet tall. Of darker skin tone*. 1832, Private. In Control. Funny. Modern Day, Seemingly Open and Older. Suspicious of Others. Loud.

JOHN & JOHN MODERN DAY – He. Him. They. Them. *White. 25. Shorter than Mother*. 1832, Outgoing. Lacks Empathy. Avoidant. In Modern day, there is major musical theater energy, and his anxiety shows through his speaking patterns. *John is imperfect, he's going to be a better ally in his own time. (I'd hang out with him).*

CUFFEE (JANITOR) & CUFFEE MODERN-DAY – He. Him. *Black. 32*. 1832, Loud. Unapologetic. Bold. Modern Day, Huggable. Lovable. Shy. Silly. Just wants everyone to have STRUCTURED FUN.

SETTING

African Baptist Church's Graveyard & A Cabin Behind the Graveyard in Philadelphia (built in 1931).

TIME

Time Interchanges Between…

October 21st through October 23rd of **1832** *& July 2nd – July 4th of* **"The Year You Are Currently In"**

AUTHOR'S NOTES

– The dialogue should run at the speed of lighting. The more air the more we lose the play. Mother, Charity, John, and Cuffee are fighters.
– There may be confusion that arises between when you are "modern" & and when you "aren't". That is the point.
– A clock is needed for the play.
– Do I think we are our ancestors? No.
– This is a mother daughter love story. I'd also love to argue this a comedy.
– *Moses is Charity's father & Mother's husband.*
– The graves do not have "gravestones".

– Everyone has Camp Lightford shirts in modern day. And Cuffee has a slightly nicer camp shirt.
– Casting: John should be under 5”6’.

What is our responsibility to time?
What stories bloom in the gaps of the unknown?
How do fragments turn into nightmares?

I loved diving into Harriet A. Washington, Daina Ramey Berry, Lesley M. Rankin-Hill
Gary B. Nash work, and The Schomburg Library research's division to add key facts to the play.

I also, want to thank Soho Rep (Eric, Caleb, Cynthia.), Evren, MacDowell, Zena, Kalungi, Arminda, Heather, Dr. Deborah, The Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Alex Gold, and of course all of Theatre503 (I am forever grateful for you & to you.). Thank you to Woolly Mammoth and Company One. Mina, Sonia, Maria, Josh, Summer, and Shawn you are incredible.

And most importantly, Mom, Dad, and Maxwell you are my heart.

This play is for anyone who is feels connected to land, and doesn't know why but wishes to.

Scene One

(There is a digital clock above stage left, which bleeps 72:00:00 over and over at the top of the play. October 21st, 1832. African Baptist Church's Graveyard in Philadelphia. It is one in the morning. **CHARITY** *&* **MOTHER** *sit at opposite ends of Moses' grave. Visually, the audience should not understand that we are at a gravesite. The clock countdowns to 56:00:00. It continues to countdown throughout the scene.)*

CHARITY. Mommie.

MOTHER. Yes?

CHARITY. I miss food.

MOTHER. Yes. I do, as well.

CHARITY. Are you well?

MOTHER. New.

.

Empty.

CHARITY. Cold?

MOTHER. Are you these things?

CHARITY. Hungry?

Sad?

Cold?

I'm angry as well.

MOTHER. I gather that. Talk about something else Charity.

CHARITY. Do you think I could be an apprentice?

MOTHER. Where?

CHARITY. I thought you could help me figure that out.

MOTHER. You don't want to take over my business?

CHARITY. If you really want me to, I will.

MOTHER. You hate preparing the candy pulls.

Even though mine are the best in town.

CHARITY. WILL WE EVER BE ABLE TO EAT AGAIN?

MOTHER. Charity, sh!

CHARITY. *(Like her perception of a dictator.)* A BAN OF ALL DAIRY, FRUITS, AND VEGETABLES IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA.

NO DRINKING COLD WATER.

HEAT YOUR WATER

HEAT IT.

MOTHER. Let's play the quiet game.

CHARITY. No.

MOTHER. *(Closes eyes.) Beat*

CHARITY. Mom.

Mom.

Mommy.

Mom.

Mom.

Mommy.

Mom.

Do you know what day it is?

MOTHER. The 21st. October 21st, 1832 *(Pronounced eighteen hundred and thirty-two.).*

CHARITY. And *this* was the day that my daddy died. You still think there are no bodies left in these graves besides/

MOTHER. /Possibly just this one.

CHARITY. Daddy got to be next to the tree. He must be happy.

MOTHER. It cost extra.

Twenty for the preparation and the pine box.

Five to be next to the tree.

CHARITY. Are you resting your eyes?

MOTHER. Does it look like I am?

CHARITY. Yes.

MOTHER. You'll be the eyes.

I'll be the ears.

(Points to herself.) Bat. *(Points to* **CHARITY**.*)* Owl.

CHARITY. You can't hear that well.

MOTHER. I heard you sneak out last Friday past curfew.

CHARITY. What?

MOTHER. What?

CHARITY. I did not.

MOTHER. Oh. My ears must be *off*.

CHARITY. Agreed.

MOTHER. I could get fined if they caught you.

CHARITY. *(Okay you caught me.)* Me, Noah and/

MOTHER. /Abel snuck into African Baptists' basement.

CHARITY. Did you follow me?!

MOTHER. I made sure to stick around just in case you got caught.

CHARITY. Ok.

MOTHER. And I saw you and Noah, Abel, **and Faith** drinking whiskey.

I wondered where you got whisky from Charity, your father's cabinet perhaps?

CHARITY. ...

MOTHER. *(Opening her eyes.)* Oh, no more talking?

(Closing her eyes.) I was enjoying myself.

CHARITY. Why did you wait until now to say these words?

MOTHER. Your father falling ill, nothing more.

CHARITY. I kissed Noah.

MOTHER. And Faith.

CHARITY. MOM.

MOTHER. If word got out.

CHARITY. I know.

MOTHER. Okay.

CHARITY. I'm sorry.

MOTHER. For?

CHARITY. Being foolish.

MOTHER. There are eyes everywhere.

CHARITY. Even now?

MOTHER. Yes.

.

.

.

Though, the night guard is absent.

CHARITY. Strange. He'll be back shortly. I'm sure.

MOTHER. Or he won't be.

CHARITY. Try not to worry.

MOTHER. Every word. Every interaction. The way your father was handled/

CHARITY. You doubt what we've been told.

MOTHER. And you don't. But, you must.

MOTHER. Before your father died, he told me about these metal cages that people in Scotland put over the pine boxes to lock the bodies in.

CHARITY. That would be nice.

MOTHER. Right?!

CHARITY. You think white people have those?

MOTHER. No. Most of their locks are invisible.

CHARITY. How do we get those locks?

MOTHER. Turn white.

CHARITY. Pass.

MOTHER. Exactly that.

CHARITY. *(Random.)* I plan to marry a caterer, so I never have to touch the kitchen.

MOTHER. A cook, you mean?

CHARITY. What's on the menu tonight, I'd ask?

(Suffering because of the food ban.)

Soup? Bread? Rice?

I know we'd be eating the same boring food night after night.

But it's okay, because my meals would be prepared by a COOK, you see MAMA?

(New Thought.) You can't even make your candy pulls anymore since lemons are banned.

So even if I marry, what he goin' make us now?

A bowl of nothin'?

It's awful.

MOTHER. A cook ain't goin' to want to cook when he gets home from cookin'.

When the catering businesses open back up, you'll have to eat leftovers from the kitchens.

Why you talkin' about marrying when you want to apprentice anyway?

Focus on yourself.

Then worry about that other stuff.

CHARITY. *(Waaat, don't get married?!)* NO MARRIAGE? MOMMIE ARE YOU SICK?

MOTHER. *(We're in a graveyard.)* Don't joke here.

.

.

Live your life the way you choose.

I want that for you.

Daddy wanted that for you.

CHARITY. Guess what I brought with me to keep us occupied?

MOTHER. Moses' old newspaper from New York City.

*(***CHARITY** *digs through a bag.)*

Clouding your mind with the world's old news.

That your daddy didn't want you lookin' at.

You couldn't wait a DAY Charity

CHARITY.
(Opens the newspaper.)

(Upon discovery.) MOM.
STOP. MOM.

MOTHER. What?!

CHARITY. THERE'S A WIDOWER

WHO HAD AN AD OUT ABOUT

FINDING A WIFE.

He was looking for someone

Sweet

Quiet

MOTHER. I'm out of the running.

CHARITY. You can't marry again.

It wouldn't be right.

MOTHER. I'm not being serious.

I'm thirty-four anyway.

Should've died already.

CHARITY. *(Reading from the newspaper.)* Knows French.

MOTHER. He's asking for a lot.

CHARITY. There's fifteen more requirements.

MOTHER. Bleh.

CHARITY. Apparently, a group of local women came to see him.

And laughed in his face.

This is all happening in Connecticut by the way.

MOTHER. Oh. That's awful.

CHARITY. I was hoping Daddy would have another newspaper from the Freedom News.

MOTHER. You need a subscription to receive the paper.

CHARITY. Can we get one?

MOTHER. Do you have "get one" money?

CHARITY. I have a dollar saved.

MOTHER. I think they went out of business, Charity.

And you'd need two more dollars.

CHARITY. There are newspaper companies here too.

MOTHER. *(Referring to her and Moses.)* We don't like the way they run their business.

CHARITY. NO. You and Daddy don't like them because the editors attend white churches.

MOTHER. Maybe. Maybe not.

CHARITY. *(Making fun.)* Maybe. Maybe not.

MOTHER. There are African churches.

Yet they attend the white churches?

The white churches that they aren't allowed to sit within.

What does that say about their writing?

Who is their newspaper really for?

(A loud sound of gushing water.)

CHARITY. What's that?!

MOTHER. They're cleaning.

Washing the streets.

CHARITY. Cleaning it of the Cholera?

MOTHER. Yes. Exactly.

CHARITY. I read the mortality list of last year, it saddens me.

MOTHER. Less cases here now, than in New York City at least.

(Looking off.) You see him approaching?

CHARITY. Yes.

Do we have a plan?

MOTHER. We just know what we are not going to allow to happen.

CHARITY. Right.

(C.)

JOHN. Mrs. Freeman?

MOTHER. I am she.

Mrs. Freeman.

JOHN. And your name, little one?

CHARITY. I'm sixteen.

JOHN. Sixteen is a great age to be.

My name is John.

MOTHER. You're at a grave for **Afric peoples**, you do realize?

JOHN. Yes.

MOTHER. Do you come here often?

JOHN. My colleagues do.

It would be my first time at this location.

MOTHER. Oh.

Well.

My husband was buried here this afternoon.

Our reasoning for being here.

JOHN. I see.

*(***JOHN** *steps forward slightly.)*

MOTHER. *(Hands raising.)* Oh.

Sir.

I'm praying.

For my husband's safe journey back to Sierra Leone.

To be with his distant family.

JOHN. Of course.

How long do you plan to pray?

MOTHER. The journey to Sierra Leone is a long one.

Have you ever been?

JOHN. You understand why I'm here, correct?

MOTHER. I know why you're here.

Correct.

You know why I'm here. Correct?

JOHN. To pray.

If that is the truth.

I can respect that, as I am a Christian myself.

MOTHER. Have you ever lost anyone close to you?

JOHN. My father. I was your daughter's age when I lost him.

MOTHER. So, you understand?

JOHN. There's a difference

I don't pray at night over his grave.