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Dramatic Publishing

STAGE BLACK

By
LYDIA R. DIAMOND

This excerpt contains strong language.



Dramatic Publishing
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STAGE BLACK

CHARACTERS

WRITER: African-American woman, 30-45. Gentle and commanding.

MONICA: African-American woman, 23 years old. Pretty, charming, intelligent. Unaware of her abundance of intellectual, personal and artistic potential.

KRYS: African-American woman, 25 years old. Attractive. More sophisticated than Monica. Though refined, Krys has an edge about her, a certain wariness that might seem suspect to one unaware of her history.

JOE: African-American man. Handsome. His air of maturity should exceed his actual age, which is anywhere from 28-35.

SASHA: (sometimes called Sashy, like wash, not mash.) African-American man, 16-18 years old. Cute, charismatic, intelligent, sensitive, insightful.

GRANDPA/JORDAN: African-American man, 65-70. Intelligent, engaging, warm, Ed Bradley meets Joe Seneca.

MAMA/BLACK AUDIENCE MEMBER 2/GRANDMA: African-American woman, 50ish.

ANNA: White, pretty, buxom, blond, 19-25. Her intelligence is natural, not the defensive intelligence of the often underestimated California blond. Anna is aware of her looks and knows how to exploit them, not because she has to, because she can.

BLACK AUDIENCE MEMBER/MAMA 2: African-American woman, 50ish. She has on a “Going to the Theatre after Church” outfit. Somewhat well-to-do. A little overly made up. Sharp, sharp, sharp.

WHITE AUDIENCE MEMBER: White woman, 30ish. Casual. She goes to the theatre a lot and doesn’t need to dress up, though her casualness is studied and expensive.

SETTING

The theater space in which the “play” takes place.

INNER SETTING

The Normal’s “Afrocentrically” decorated living room in an affluent, primarily white suburb in Middle America.

TIME

Late 1990s.

Act I

Scene i

(Curtains closed. WRITER walks onto the lip of the stage with a laptop computer. She puts it on the floor DL and walks, with the cord in her hand, back off. She enters again with a very small, light [maybe child-size] card table. She sets it up and puts laptop on top of it. She acknowledges the audience for the first time, smiling, and commanding their attention. She walks back offstage. She enters with a folding chair and sits at table. Very ceremoniously she opens laptop and begins to type.

NOTE: Whenever typing is established, during or at the top of scenes, the keyboard is miked. This sound should fade at the same speed as the WRITER's light. Never should it distract from stage dialogue.

WRITER stops, looks at audience and walks to DC...as though she's forgotten to tell them something.)

WRITER. Oh... Here's what it is I'm wanting to say to you... OK. Yes... There are certain things we hope never to see when we go to "the theatre." Dare I say things we'd pay not to see... Um, a three-hour historical one-person play written by the performer, especially if there is a plumed pen and a hat stand anywhere on the

stage. Uh, performance art where people pee in glasses and masturbate themselves with Dr Pepper bottles. Now see, I'm open-minded, and I place no value judgements on the above, and, I understand that even in these two examples there are varying degrees of competency and always the possibility that I will walk away with something, a thought, a dream, or a face full of urine. A colleague of mine, who I respect greatly, quoted a professor of his. On the first day of writing class they were told that they could write about anything. Anything at all, *except* the experience of writing itself. OK, so I'm a writer...

(MONICA pops her head out of curtain DR.)

MONICA. Hey...

WRITER. And I guess what I'm trying to say is that...

MONICA. Pssstt...

WRITER. It's important really because, while I have a way with words, I am not an actress.

MONICA. Actor... We're all *Actors* now...

WRITER. What is it?

MONICA. You're boring them. This is the beginning, right? If you lose them now it's all over.

WRITER. Do I know you?

(MONICA walks on stage and sits, cross-legged, still closer to stage R than on.)

MONICA. I think so.

WRITER. Have we met?

MONICA. In your past, in your dreams, in your future, and no.

WRITER. Can I finish?

MONICA. You *can*.

WRITER. *May I? (MONICA gestures for her to continue.)*

If we broaden the parameters of what we expect from a theatrical experience we can also broaden the possibilities of what we'll see. It's simple really, you see...

MONICA. You know what I hate to see when I go to the theatre? A nervous, doe-eyed understudy. I don't care if she's good. She'll overact or screw up and I want my money back. Straight up, no joke. And I hate people who wear big hats or African headwraps or too much perfume...and I hate people who snore, and eat hard candies with cellophane wrappers...oh, oh, oh and I hate even more those pre-curtain speeches that tell people to turn off their cell phones and unwrap their candies. The people stupid enough to do it don't listen anyway. And people who say, "What'd she say?" drive me crazy. Oh, and I hate it when... (*Pause, WRITER is looking at her incredulously.*) ...What?

WRITER. So, here's the thing. I'm a writer. It's what I do. I'm either blessed with it or condemned to it...you be the judge, but there it is. I'm a writer.

BLACK AUDIENCE MEMBER. OK, OK, you're a writer already. Jesus.

WHITE AUDIENCE MEMBER. What'd she say?

BLACK AUDIENCE MEMBER. Ssshhh...

WRITER. So, today you and you and you and I are supposed to have a relationship of some sort.

BLACK AUDIENCE MEMBER (*to WHITE AUDIENCE MEMBER*). She's gonna have relations with someone in the audience.

WHITE AUDIENCE MEMBER. Ooohhh.

WRITER. I'm supposed to be letting you into my world or something or other, and all I can tell you is that it'll be worth it. You'll get your money's worth, but, if you really have a problem with my, uh product...

MONICA. Work of art.

WRITER. ...just see the box office on your way out. And please please please don't call what you're about to see Perrindello-esque.

MONICA. Just wanted to nip that in the bud, eh?

WRITER (*speaking mostly to audience*). I'm saying. I knew you were going there, 'cause I would too. Not so much because I'd know what the hell I was talking about, but because I read that play about six actors looking for a director or whatever when I was a freshman and I can just hear it now...“why that black woman wrote a play that combined the urban grit of the Black Experience with the Italian *savoir faire* that makes the play very Perrindelloesque.” So just don't do it, OK. It's just me and you and them...so let's do it. All right?

MONICA. I'm game. But what exactly are we doing? (*MONICA goes to WRITER eagerly. WRITER takes her place at the computer.*) What are we doing?

WRITER (*still typing, not looking up*). We're writing, making, writing a play with a grandma and a grandpa, some lovely sexy stuff and some conflict.

MONICA. Why the grandma?

WRITER. Because all good black plays, at least the ones that get produced, have a grandma or at least a nice heavy old momma.

MONICA. Why be like everybody?

WRITER. 'Cause I'm tired of being poor, and anonymous.

MONICA. Everybody doesn't have money.

WRITER (*stops and looks at MONICA for first time*). But I will.

MONICA. Why?

WRITER. Because I'm writing a play with a grandma and a grandpa and some conflict and I need a new pair of shoes.

MONICA. What's conflict?

WRITER. Don't let's insult their intelligence. Who in their right mind would think that you, an all-grown-up, intelligent, "surprisingly articulate" young lady wouldn't know what "conflict" is?

MONICA. Yeah, well I'm thinking that depends greatly on the makeup of the audience, the venue, the social, socioeconomic and cultural milieu. So humor me. What's conflict?

WRITER. OK, picture this... (*Yelling to offstage R.*) Joe!!! Krys!!! (*WRITER types and reads stage directions as JOE and KRYS act them out.*) Joe and Krys enter. From opposite sides. Joe, an attractive young African-American man and Krys, an attractive, young African-American female, stand, side by side. (*Long pause. To MONICA.*) See.

MONICA. Clearly they're doing nothing...come on pick up the pace. Chop chop.

WRITER. OK. Let me try again. (*WRITER types.*) Joe and Krys embrace and share a passionate kiss.

MONICA. That was nice. But clearly that wasn't conflict.

WRITER. You're smart.

MONICA. I'm observant.

WRITER. Well observe this. (*WRITER types.*) Joe and Krys exchange previous kiss. Krys slaps Joe. (*KRYS' slap is wimpy.*) Hard. (*KRYS socks him but good.*) Better.

MONICA (*infomercial style*). Why, my goodness! Well I'll be a witch's niece if she didn't hit him. (*Beat.*) Thank you. Thank you so much. It's all so clear to me now. See, now I kinda wanna know what happened before and what's going to happen.

WRITER. I'm talented huh?

MONICA. You're (*beat*) something.

(Note: When WRITER reads stage directions, stage action follows.)

WRITER. Curtain opens revealing a comfortable, (*pause*) a beautifully decorated, comfortable, upper-middle-class living room with lots of books, plants, African and African-American art.

MONICA. Ooooo, that's pretty. Can I play?

WRITER. I'm counting on it.

(WRITER continues typing. MONICA walks on stage and sits on couch.)

WRITER. Monica, an intelligent young black...

MONICA. Could I be pretty please?

WRITER. Monica, *pretty* and intelligent, poses self-consciously, reconsiders, takes the most recent *Essence* off

of the coffee table and resumes previous pose, now thoroughly absorbed in the magazine.

(Light comes down on WRITER as it goes up on living room. WRITER is always visible silently typing in the green glow of the laptop screen.)

WRITER *(to herself)*. Joe enters...

(JOE enters.)

JOE. Hey, kid.

MONICA. 'Bout time.

JOE. What, I'm on a schedule?

MONICA. No, it's just Gran wanted me to give you a message but I don't even know if it's good anymore.

(Enter SASHA. He runs in, throwing books on coffee table and running up the stairs.)

JOE. Now that's the one to question. He looks suspect.

SASHA *(yelling downstairs, in midflight)*. It's not me, it's my bladder.

MONICA. She said to call her at the clinic if you get in before five because she needs a favor. Otherwise you're supposed to call her in the car. Or maybe it was, car before five, clinic after. Or maybe it was at her day office.

JOE. I'm supposed to meet the guys for a quick ball game. Jesus!! What am I supposed to do?

MONICA. Maybe it wasn't a favor, maybe she had to tell you something. I don't know?

JOE. You don't know? You didn't write it down?

MONICA. Sorry, I was up to my elbows in Mommy's shit at the time.

JOE. And?

MONICA. And why are you so ugly? (*Beat.*) What do you want?

JOE. Where's the phone? (*MONICA looks around the couch cushions and locates it.*) Thanks. How 'bout for Christmas we get you a phone implant.

MONICA. Maybe if you had any friends I wouldn't be able to monopolize the phone so much.

SASHA (*walking down stairs*). I think she got you, man.

JOE. I stopped having friends when you decided they were all supposed to be yours. (*MONICA and SASHA just stare at him.*) Just throw me the goddamn phone. (*MONICA tosses it to JOE.*)

SASHA. It was a joke.

MONICA. Why are you the only one in this family who's fit to do Gran favors anyway?

SASHA. 'Cause he's the prettiest.

(JOE ignores them and fishes through his bookbag, removing books and papers, and finally, a well-worn, leather telephone book. He makes no attempt to clean up the mess he's made during the search. The conversation continues on top of JOE's business.)

MONICA. No, Sasha, you're the prettiest.

SASHA. Maybe she thinks he's the most responsible.

MONICA. You think?

SASHA. Could be.

MONICA (*yelling UL, toward open door to study*).
Grandpa...who's the most responsible?

GRANDPA (*offstage*). You are, baby.

SASHA. Grandpa...who's the prettiest?

GRANDPA (*offstage, without missing a beat*). Monica.

MONICA. Grandpa...who's your favorite?

GRANDPA (*offstage*). Grandma. (*SASHA and MONICA laugh.*)

SASHA. I knew he would say that.

JOE. Hi, Mrs. uh hello?... Yeah, I'll hold. (*Pause, putting hand over mouthpiece.*) Well we know who's not the most polite. Damn, could you two shut up for just a second? Act like no one taught you any fucking...

MONICA (*to SASHA*). If you pretend you can't hear him sometimes he'll shut up.

JOE (*back to phone*). Yes. Hello, Mrs. Johnson? It's Joe. (*Pause.*) Her grandson. Oh fine, thank you. School's great. Monica's good. Yes it is too bad about that name thing. She doesn't get out much so I don't think she's getting too much ribbing. Um huh...uh huh...slut's the word...I'm saying...

MONICA. What's she saying about me?

JOE (*covering the mouthpiece and whispering*). The Lewinsky thing.

SASHA. Sucks to be you this decade.

MONICA. It's cool, maybe I can write a book. *Monica on Monica.*

SASHA. Hopefully something more eventful will happen and they'll forget all about it.

MONICA. They'll never forget... (*MONICA and SASHA laugh and tease each other.*)

JOE (*to MONICA and SASHA*). Sssshhhhh...oh, hi. I really need to speak to Gra... Yes Shasha's fine. Yes class president... She read about you in the paper, Sasha...

Yes, we're all very proud of him... I'm sorry to cut you off, I really need to talk to... She's with a patient? This late? Well get her out. I'll hold. (*Beat.*) Oh... (*To MONICA.*) She's in the middle of a "procedure" and can't be interrupted. (*To phone.*) Fine just tell her to call. Tell her it's urgent. Yeah yeah...you too. Gotta go. Hangin' up the phone now...you too, uh huh... Bye.

MONICA. You're smooth.

JOE. How was Moms today, Mon?

MONICA. Sasha, why does he ask me that?

SASHA. Seems like a fair question.

JOE (*to SASHA*). Thank you, homey.

MONICA. Homey?

SASHA. No prob. Bro.

MONICA. Bro? Why do you call me Mon, Joe. Makes you sound like a Jamaican. Makes me sound like a retard.

SASHA. Not funny, Mon.

JOE. If the shoe fits...

SASHA. Just answer his question, Mon.

MONICA. What? You're gonna be on the same side? Is this like a testosterone thing, 'cause I can leave?

JOE. It's cool, you've got more testosterone than Sasha anyway.

SASHA. Go to hell!

MONICA & JOE (*under their breath*). Ssssh, Grandpa.

MONICA (*swatting at SASHA*). What's wrong with you? Grandpa doesn't want to hear that kind of language.

SASHA. I don't like sissy jokes.

MONICA. What are you talking about?

SASHA. The sissy crap. It's different when it's about you.

MONICA. 'Cause I can take a joke, that's the only difference.