

Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.



Dramatic Publishing

Colorized covers are for web display only. Most covers are printed in black and white.

SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND

SATIRICAL DRAMA BY KIRSTEN GREENIDGE

SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND

Drama. By Kirsten Greenidge.

Cast: 1m., 5w. Lena's days as a nanny seem numbered. Her new job is much more difficult than she'd hoped, and she struggles to keep her composure, and her secrets, while battling with the state-of-the-art washing machine that devours all of her young charge Greta's clothing; the long-suffering housekeeper, Carmel, who is angling for Lena's position in the family; and the peculiar needs of Greta's parents. Carol, a high-powered attorney, and Greg, an architect whose African-inspired designs are finding no takers in the corporate world to which his wife wishes he would cater, are beginning to show signs of wear as they strive to maintain the affluent lifestyle they have worked hard to achieve. And then there's Charlotte, Greta's teacher, whom Lena meets while retrieving Greta from one of her numerous after-school activities. Consumed with contempt for materialism and an admiration for the sans-culottes, militant revolutionaries associated with the French revolution, Charlotte promises to help Lena improve herself so she can quit nannying. Meanwhile, very little attention is being paid to Greta, who has picked up mixed and startling messages about being black and begins to retreat into an imagined utopia influenced by Disney's standards of female beauty. However, Charlotte's promises to Lena begin to falter as Carol's prejudices concerning class and ethnicity emerge and her demands on Lena spiral out of control. *Sans-culottes in the Promised Land* careens to a chilling end, where each member of this African-American household is forced to come to terms with the conditions in which each lives in the promised land of America. **Area staging. Approximate running time: 95 minutes.**

Code: S15

13 ISBN: 978-1-58342-365-3

10 ISBN: 1-58342-365-6



www.dramaticpublishing.com

Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel



Printed on Recycled Paper

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land

Kirsten Greenidge

Dramatic Publishing



SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND

A Play

by

KIRSTEN GREENIDGE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMVI by
KIRSTEN GREENIDGE
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:
Bruce Ostler, Bret Adams Ltd., 448 West 44th Street,
New York NY 10036 - Phone: (212) 765-5630

ISBN: 1-58342-368-0

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the Play must give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the Author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. In all programs this notice must appear:

Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

All producers of the Play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“World premiere in the 2004 Humana Festival of New American
Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.”

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was originally commissioned by South Coast Repertory with support from The Elizabeth George Foundation.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was world premiered in the 2004 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was read at Oregon Shakespeare Festival in September 2003.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was developed at the Fall Festival of the Future at Madison Repertory Theatre in September 2003.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was read at the Hourglass Retreat at Choate-Rosemary Hall in July 2003.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was developed at New Dramatists' Playtime Retreat in November 2002.

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land was created in part at The Sundance Theatre Laboratory Retreat at Ucross, Wyoming, in February 2002.

SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND

A Play in One Act
For 1 man, 5 women

CHARACTERS:

LENA 25 years old

CARMEL mid-50s

GRETA 8 years old

CAROL early 40s

GREG early 40s

CHARLOTTE mid-20s, older than Lena

SETTING: A suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, 1999.

NOTES ON THE TEXT:

Instances where slashes occur (/) indicate where text should overlap.

Instances where pauses occur should not be ignored.

The sounds that occur throughout the play should not be overlooked. They are an important layer in the piece and should be executed exactly as they appear.

NOTES ON CASTING:

The characterization of Greta is quite intricate and therefore it is highly recommended that Greta be played by an older actor who is able to appropriate the mannerisms of an eight-year-old and grasp the nuances of Greta's character specifically.

NOTES ON TONE, STYLE AND PRESENTATION:

Sans-culottes in the Promised Land is extremely style sensitive. It is *not* meant to be read or performed as a melodrama or family drama. The dialogue should be delivered swiftly and deliberately. Think Pinter. Think Beckett. Do not allow the presentation to delve into the realm of "black family-kitchen sink-realism." (Not that there's anything wrong with that but...) Let the play be buoyant.

The emotions and issues presented in the text are not to be interpreted as "the tips of icebergs," they *are* the icebergs: moving quietly but forcefully toward a finite and final destination. The play does not utilize a traditional dramaturgical structure. The characters do not develop in the conventional sense, with one character's story taking precedence over that of other characters'. All the characters and their stories work in concert to propel the play toward its end, which is meant to be inevitable and unavoidable.

Elements in the play, Lena's letters and Charlotte's trees, for example, are absurd. It will frustrate the velocity of the play and cause numerous headaches to the actors and production staff if they are deconstructed before they have the chance to simply exist on their own.

SANS-CULOTTES IN THE PROMISED LAND

(Darkness.

The sound of a dryer buzzer.

Light.

LENA stands in front of a large, oversized washing machine. She pulls out a piece of discolored clothing, holds it up:)

LENA. Oooo. Not again. *(LENA pulls out more ripped clothes.)*

CARMEL *(offstage)*. Hey. *(LENA freezes.)* You. *(LENA shuts the washer door.)* Why you leave basement door open? Sign say right here near knob “close basement door.”

LENA. Next time—

CARMEL. Next time? I tell.

(Door shuts. LENA waits, to be sure CARMEL is gone.)

LENA. Next time: I'll *lock* it: keep you out of my face.
(LENA opens washer, looks inside, then shuts washer lid.) Stupid machine. Stupid, stupid.

(The sound of a spray bottle.)

Shift:

We see CHARLOTTE as she sprays the leaves of a plant. She steps back, regards the plant, then sprays it again.

Shift:

A child's room. Piles of clothes clutter the space. CAROL rifles through a dresser, pulls out clothes and tests them against each other to see if they match.)

GRETA (*hidden*). I'm far-away-lost. It's up to you to find me, to discover me.

CAROL. Come *out*.

GRETA. I've got Snow White in here. Want to see her?

CAROL. You know how I feel about that Snow White—

(GREG enters hurriedly.)

GREG. I can take her but only if we leave now. I have a breakfast meeting.

CAROL. Well, check you out, Mr. Man. Did you hear that, Greta? Daddy has a breakfast meeting with a new client— (*CAROL pulls GREG to her with the loose end of his tie, gives him a kiss.*)

GREG. Why is this room such a mess? Don't we pay those nannies to keep it clean?

GRETA. I'm too old for a nanny.

CAROL (*straightening his tie*). When they talk numbers—

GREG. Numbers—?

CAROL. Fees, Greg—

GREG. Oh—

CAROL. *Money*—

GREG. Right—

CAROL. Don't go accepting the first thing they offer—

GREG. This room should be clean. That last one kept this room clean.

GRETA. But Snow White could watch me. Snow White's perfect to guide me.

GREG. You should have her dressed by now.

GRETA. Or Cinderella? Maybe Cinderella—

CAROL. Well what does it look like I'm doing?

GRETA. —how about Pocahontas? She's not so bad (*sing-song*) and she's brow-own.

CAROL. No Cinderella. No Pocahontas. How many times do I have to say it, Greta, those movies misrepresent standards of—

GREG. See? See? You're doing it all wrong.

GRETA. So Mulan?

CAROL. I'm doing it all wrong.

GRETA. Mulan could work.

GREG. You keep talking to her like you're having cocktails and a chat: no wonder she's not dressed.

GRETA. Mommy, how about Mulan?

GREG. Watch. (*To GRETA:*) Greta? Come Out Now. (*To CAROL:*) Get it? No conversation: lots of love, *disciplined* love, right?

CAROL (*skeptical*). Disciplined love.

GREG. Yes. Now— (*To GRETA.*) Greta? (*GREG playfully gestures for CAROL to scoot to the side, then prepares himself, then:*) Greta, sweetheart, this is Daddy speaking, this is Daddy using his serious voice, understand? and you're to do as you're told. (*Pause.*) Greta. (*Slight pause.*) Greta?

GRETA. What's wrong with Pocahontas and Mulan?

CAROL. HA. You know, those nannies don't engage her enough, that's why she acts like this, that's why she reverts to this type of behavior.

GRETA. Since no one will tell me what the problem with Pocahontas is, I'm going back to Snow White in the first place.

CAROL. I'll talk to Lena about this first chance I get.

GREG. Who's Lena?

CAROL. The sitter.

GREG. You got rid of the last one, poof, easy as that?

CAROL. Yes, poof, easy as that.

GRETA. Me and Snow White? We're lost in a wood. We're deep, deep in the forest.

CAROL. Come OUT.

GREG. I liked that last one.

CAROL. Maybe I should make Lena a reading list.

GRETA. Follow Snow White's voice:

GREG. The last one didn't need a list.

GRETA (*in a high pitched, affected accent*). "Do try ever so hard to find me, Father; do try ever so hard to discover me, Mother. Do, please."

CAROL. The last one couldn't follow any of my instructions—

GRETA. "This forest is ever so wretched—"

GREG. When she gets like this, Carol—

GRETA. “—and ever so dreadful.”

GREG. When she gets like this, honestly, I can’t—

GRETA. “Or perhaps it’s a thicket.”

GREG. I can’t get into this now, I’m *late*.

GRETA. “Oh bother, am I in a thicket, or a forest?”

CAROL. And I’m not?

GRETA. “Perchance it’s a *glade*.”

GREG (*as he exits*). I have a *breakfast* meeting.

CAROL (*as she exits*). You can’t just walk away from her like that, Greg: you’ll damage.

GRETA. “Yes, yes, a glade, Father. Mother, do tell Father I’m in a glade and it’s his duty to save me, to find me. Mother?” (*Slight pause.*) Mom?

(*A dryer buzzer sounds.*)

Shift:

LENA in the laundry room. The washing machine makes a sickly noise. LENA kicks it. The buzzer sounds again, but does not stop. LENA pushes buttons over and over until the machine stops buzzing. Silence. LENA relaxes a bit. The machine begins to thump, then buzz. LENA hurries away.

A dryer buzzer sounds.

Shift:

CHARLOTTE and GRETA, playing mankala.)

CHARLOTTE. In Africa, they didn't use a board.

GRETA. Oh yeah?

CHARLOTTE. They drew the playing area in the dirt.

GRETA. There's a horse the color of dirt at riding. I do more than this class. I do riding. And ballet.

CHARLOTTE. I have diagrams of the playing areas at home in books.

GRETA. That horse isn't my favorite.

CHARLOTTE. I'll bring them in to show you.

GRETA. I feed carrots to my favorite.

CHARLOTTE. I'm trying to teach you things.

GRETA. And apples.

CHARLOTTE. About our heritage, about how strong it is. We have so much to be proud of.

GRETA. Like playing in the dirt? (*Beat.*) If you ask me, playing in the dirt's not all so special.

CHARLOTTE. *Mankala* is an ancient game passed down through the *ages*. By *Africans*.

GRETA. My favorite horse is the color of sugar but I don't always get to ride him. Those days, when I don't get to ride him, I hate riding, I *de-test* riding. I may as well be here. Your turn.

CHARLOTTE. I know what you need. Flashcards. I'll call them Heritage Holders. I'll give them to your parents to do with you at night with your homework.

GRETA. My parents don't do the homework with me, the nannies do.

CHARLOTTE. So I'll give them to one of the nannies. "Heritage Holders." I can't believe I never thought of them before. Our heritage, Greta, is astounding. We come from great traditions, great, great history. Just you wait, these Heritage Holders will show you the real you,

the Nubian princess you, the you that used to walk on wide-open plains, dark black skin glistening, glowing, under the steamy su—

GRETA. Are you going to take your turn or not? If you are, you should hurry up. This game isn't very fun, you know.

(A cell phone rings.

Shift:

CAROL in the kitchen, on the phone. CARRMEL sweeps around her, getting closer and closer, humming loudly and without melodic appeal.)

CAROL. He won't go any higher. *(CARRMEL sweeps closer to CAROL. CAROL watches CARRMEL. CARRMEL hums.)* I'm sorry, what was that? *(CARRMEL hums.)* I'm sorry, just a moment. *(CARRMEL sweeps and hums.)* Carrmel. *(CARRMEL stops sweeping and humming, looks at CAROL.)* Please. *(CAROL goes back to her phone call.)* What were you saying? *(Pause.)* Well that's not my problem. *(CARRMEL sweeps, hums quieter.)* He won't cough up any more so you can take that offer and— *(CARRMEL sweeps closer to CAROL.)* Excuse me. Carrmel. *(CARRMEL looks at CAROL, then sweeps as she walks away, humming.)* No, no, it's nothing. Just the housekeeper: you know how it is. *(Lets out a skittish laugh.)* Now where were we?

(Shift:

A car. LENA in the front, GRETA in the back, nervous, furtive...)

LENA. How was class?

GRETA. I don't like the clay feeling on my hands. You should drive now.

(Pause.

LENA turns to the steering wheel, prepares to drive. A loud voice is heard in the distance. It is CHARLOTTE.)

CHARLOTTE *(offstage)*. Greta? GRETA— *(CHARLOTTE approaches the car, wildly waving a piece of material. LENA and GRETA stare at her.)*

GRETA. Drive away, it's only Ms. Grey.

LENA. But she's your teacher.

GRETA. Not a real teacher. This isn't school, it's just a stupid class my mom makes me come to. Drive away or she'll try to talk.

(More wild waving from CHARLOTTE. LENA pushes the power window button and all watch as the window goes all the way down. Once the window is down:)

CHARLOTTE. She forgot her *ken-tae* cloth. *(CHARLOTTE and LENA look at GRETA, who does not move. CHARLOTTE tries to hand GRETA the material.)* Honey, you forgot your *ken-tae* cloth. *(GRETA does not move.)*

LENA. Greta. *(No response. To CHARLOTTE:)* Sorry. *(To GRETA:)* Greta.

CHARLOTTE. I had them make their own *ken-tae* cloths using dye from vegetables. I didn't read it in a book, I thought it up myself. You're the nanny?

GRETA. I'm hungry.

LENA. Lena.

CHARLOTTE. I'm going to be making some flashcards for Greta. To get her into her heritage. I'm going to call them Heritage Holders. I just came up with it this afternoon during Mankala Monday time. When she does her homework make sure she reviews all of them. (*CHARLOTTE shoves the cloth at LENA. LENA takes the material. Just as she does, CHARLOTTE reaches for her hair.*) It's so dry. Like straw, girl. Like any second a cow could walk over and start to chew on your head. (*CHARLOTTE dramatically makes a chewing sound, moves her jaw up and down and around.*) But don't you worry. I have just the thing.

(*A phone rings.*

Shift:

CAROL in the kitchen, on her phone.)

CAROL. ...it's nothing, I'm fine. So, yes, go on...well frankly...I don't know why there's a holdup, I've explained McIntyre's position—

(*GRETA runs into the kitchen at full speed, backpack strapped on her back. She bombards CAROL with a hug.*)

CAROL. Oh, honey, oh, back so soon? (*Into phone:*) Hold on, it's just Greta... My *daughter*...yes, you've met, at the...that's right, the Christmas— (*GRETA kneels on the floor and opens her backpack. Papers and grade-school paraphernalia fly out of the pack.*) Oh, dear, where's Lena? (*She breathes in.*) And what's that smell?

LENA (*entering*). I think, um, it's those horses.

GRETA (*pulls out a purple prize ribbon*). For best posting. At riding.

CAROL. Fabulous. How absolutely fabulous: a blue ribbon—

GRETA. It's purple.

CAROL. Purple? Oh. Well. Better next time, yes?

GRETA. But it's still good, right?

CAROL. Sh. Not now, sweetie. (*Into phone:*) Still there? (*GRETA moves closer to CAROL, tries to hug CAROL again.*) Once is good for now, Greta, Mommy's working. (*Into phone:*) Sorry. (*To LENA:*) Why don't you make her a snack? (*Into phone:*) Hello? Yes? Today? No, I can't today, I'm taking a personal...a little headache... (*Pause.*) I know that, but this is my case, I built— (*CAROL notices that GRETA hasn't moved. CAROL looks to LENA, then GRETA, then LENA again. Annoyed:*) Snack? Yes?

LENA. I think she wants to share—

CAROL. *Snack.* (*LENA guides GRETA away and the two exit.*) Yes, still here. (*A dryer buzzer sounds. CAROL, pinching the bridge of her nose:*) Ooo.