

**Polar Bears, Black Boys  
&  
Prairie Fringed Orchids**

**By**

**Vincent Terrell Durham**

**Cast in Order of Appearance**

Jaquan Wallace

Peter Castle

Molly Castle

Shameka Davis

Tom

Rita Dupree

Officer Lennox

Elijah Dupree

## Character Breakdown

**Jaquan Wallace:** Black-American, male, 33 years old, born and raised in Harlem, NY. Childhood bullying and the untimely death of his mother have created an easy-going and nurturing man. He's an elementary school teacher and Black Lives Matter activist. He has found his voice in the BLM movement but has yet to find that same fierceness when it comes to his personal life. He is openly gay and questioning his 3-year relationship with his white lover.

**Peter Castle:** White-American, male, 40 years old, born and raised to a blue-collar, middle-class family in Upstate New York. He worked to put himself through college and medical school and believes anyone is able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Nonetheless, he would give you the shirt off of his back. He is not a racist or bigot but impatient with political correctness and the thought that the playing field has been easier for him than others. His home is a refuge from a stressful career as an emergency room trauma surgeon and a place to attempt humor. He has been married to Molly Castle for 12 years. He is the father to the couple's adopted 3-year-old black son. He still hopes to have a biological child with his wife.

**Molly Castle:** White-American, female, 38 years old, born and raised on Long Island, NY to a blue-collar, middle-class family. Her parents encouraged education and paid for all of their children to attend private schools and the best colleges the family budget could afford. She is the co-founder of a non-profit environmental foundation and dedicated to saving the planet. She is a wide-eyed optimist, intelligent, and eager to explore things outside her own experience. She is happy with her marriage and being a mother of one.

**Shameka Davis:** Black-American, female, 34 years old, born and raised in Harlem, NY to a middle-class family. Her mother is a music teacher and her father previously owned the bookstore that she now operates. She is not a "Sassy Black Girl" but a straightforward, well-read, college-educated, confident, single, Black woman. She burns Sage, loves candles, and believes in the powers of crystals.

**Tom:** White-American, male, 33 years old, born and raised in Manhattan, NY to a well-to-do family. He's a classic movie buff. He has been educated at all the best schools. A poor little rich boy with a former Meth and alcohol addiction. He now runs a drug rehab facility. He has traded drug addiction for an addiction to his lover Jaquan and everything black. He is openly gay, straightforward, and highly opinionated.

**Rita Dupree:** Black-American, female, 28 years old, born and raised in Harlem, NY. She is a single mother and appears much younger than her actual age. Her two jobs at a dollar store and Roy Rogers has her family living well below the median income for New York City. She is grieving the death of her son Elijah Dupree at the hands of NYPD three weeks prior.

**Officer Lennox:** White-American, male, 30s, NYPD officer. (Character to be doubled by actor portraying Tom.)

**Elijah Dupree:** Black-American, male, 12 years old, slight build. Rita Dupree's deceased son.

### Setting

Harlem, New York. A cold February night, 2019. The first floor of Peter and Molly Castle's renovated brownstone. The front entrance area is grand with a huge walk in closet off to the side. The extra-large main room has wood floors, bookcases overflowing with novels, beautiful artwork, unique knick-knacks, high-end furniture and an elegant bar. A beautiful staircase rises to the 2nd floor of the home. The room is partially set for a cocktail party. Fresh flowers are placed throughout the room. It's clear the room was designed to entertain and delight guests and the current homeowners have brought it back to its full glory. Two half-circle archways signal the end of the room and lead to other parts of the house. The right archway leads to a gourmet kitchen. The left archway leads to bedrooms and a guest bathroom.

### **A note from the playwright regarding Jaquan mimicking a Western Lowland Gorilla.**

Early in the play, Peter mimics a Western Lowland Gorilla. Jaquan later also imitates a Western Lowland Gorilla, which is exact beat for beat to Peter's earlier imitation. This is merely a coincidence as far as the story of the play is concerned. Jaquan has no knowledge of Peter's earlier imitation.

This moment is meant to challenge the audience in a couple of ways. Every political season there seems to be a non-Black candidate who shares a cartoon of his/her Black rival eating watermelon and then pleads ignorance, "I had no idea it had racial implications." The same can be said for non-Black folks showing up in blackface at the Halloween office party and then claiming they had no idea it was racially insensitive.

The uncomfortable feeling of watching a Black man act as a Western Lowland Gorilla is a juxtaposition to the laughs and giggles a White man receives performing the same imitation. The moment is to show that "we" (collectively) almost instinctively recognize racial tropes and for people to deny that these images aren't ingrained in the American psyche is a lie.

I hope the two scenes will pose the following questions to the audience. When did racist depictions of Black people become a part of their own consciousness? Apes, monkeys and gorillas is an old racial trope, but are we aware that hoodies have become a new racial trope? A Black man in a hoodie is often seen as a threat, while a White man in a hoodie is just a man in a hoodie. In the context of the play, I'm unable to put Peter and Jaquan in hoodies, but I attempt to cause the same emotional reaction by using their imitations of Western Lowland Gorillas.

- 1. Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids was commissioned and originally developed by PlayGround (James A. Kleinmann, Artistic Director) in association with Planet Earth Arts (Michael Fried, Artistic Director.)**
- 2. Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids was presented as part of the inaugural Juneteenth Theatre Justice Project (Aldo Billingslea, Producer.)**
- 3. Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids was developed, in part, through Words Cubed, Utah Shakespeare Festival's new play development program.**

AT RISE:

ACT ONE

*(The lights are off in the entrance area and main room.)*

*(JAQUAN stands up from behind the bar. He holds a potted Western Prairie Fringed Orchid. He climbs the stairs and exits.)*

*(PETER enters from the right archway. He carries a tray of hors d'oeuvres. The motion sensor lights fail to respond to his movement and remain off. PETER places the tray down on a buffet table. He makes several exaggerated movements in hopes of the lights turning on. They don't.)*

PETER

Alexa, lights.

*(The lights click on.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Alexa, play favorite jazz mix.

ALEXA (V.O.)

Playing Kenny G.

*(Music plays. \*Any instrumental jazz sax.)*

*(PETER exits back into the kitchen. He returns carrying a rack filled with martini glasses. He places it on top of the bar and exits back to the kitchen. Ten to fifteen seconds pass and the lights click off.)*

*(MOLLY enters and places a baby monitor on an accent cabinet. The lights fail to click on from her movement. MOLLY makes a wild gesture but the lights still fail to respond. She moves to another part of the room and makes a second wild gesture. The lights click on.)*

*(MOLLY yells out to PETER to be heard in the kitchen.)*

MOLLY

We need to call the contractors. The motion sensor lights aren't working.

*(PETER yells back from the kitchen. This back and forth of raised voices continues until PETER enters the main room.)*

PETER (O.S.)

Motion sensor lighting was your idea. I'll keep asking Alexa.

MOLLY

I finally got Jason to go down.

PETER (O.S.)

Then is it smart for us to be yelling?

*(MOLLY heads to the walk in closet.)*

MOLLY

We have eleven inch thick walls. A parade could pass by and he would sleep right through it.

*(MOLLY enters the walk in closet. The door remains open.)*

*(PETER enters with a bucket of ice and places it beneath the bar.)*

PETER

Did you tell Jason he was a sea turtle?

MOLLY (O.S.)

Yes, we all are.

PETER

Would you mind explaining that?

MOLLY (O.S.)

I explained it last week when we were polar bears. You've stopped listening to your wife.

PETER

Most husbands have, but I'm listening now. Alexa, stop.



*(Music stops.)*

*(PETER goes about placing the martini glasses beneath the bar.)*

*(MOLLY emerges from the walk in closet carrying a step ladder and a tool box. She sets up in front of two paintings on the wall; **Head of a Sleeping Woman** by Pablo Picasso and **Dance** by Henri Matisse.)*

MOLLY

Each week we identify as a different endangered species. We're teaching Jason to care for and protect all living creatures on the planet.

PETER

I don't think we should burden our three year old by putting him in charge of animal conservation. He barely has the concept of going in the potty. Maybe saving the planet can wait.

MOLLY

It's not a burden. We're working to raise both an outstanding young man and a concerned citizen for the environment. And one with better aim at the potty than his father.

PETER

Women will never know how difficult it is to pee out of a penis. You can aim it, but sometimes it misfires. *(pause)* This morning, he asked the girl at Starbucks if her eggs were going to be safe buried beneath the sand or get eaten by seagulls.

MOLLY

Her tiny delicate sea turtle eggs face a host of threats. Seagulls are the least of them. The biggest are you, me and the rest of the world continuing to heat up our oceans and building ridiculous beach houses on their nesting grounds.

*(MOLLY eyeballs the perfect position to place the nail and climbs the ladder. She taps the nail into the wall.)*

PETER

The girl working at Starbucks wasn't a sea turtle. Although she was very slow moving and couldn't get the foam right on my cappuccino. I'm certain her eggs were safely tucked inside her ovaries and not buried beneath the sand. You're going to have Jason climbing into polar bear cages thinking he's found his baby brother.

MOLLY

We are against caging polar bears or any type of wild animals, but we do want Jason to see animals as his brothers and sisters.

*(MOLLY climbs down from the ladder and steps back to inspect her work.)*

PETER

Can we be rabbits next?

MOLLY

Not many rabbit species are endangered, Peter.

PETER

Our sex life is. Let's be rabbits next week and screw like crazy.

MOLLY

Next week we're the endangered western lowland gorilla and then the week after that, endangered Galapagos penguins. Besides, your mother will be staying with us. We can't be rabbits during her visit.

*(PETER launches into an imitation of a western lowland gorilla. He apes his way to MOLLY and begins grooming her. PETER grabs MOLLY up in his arms. She responds with laughter and breaks free of his hold.)*

PETER

Don't western lowland gorillas have sex?

MOLLY

Not while its mother-in-law is listening from the guest bedroom.

PETER

What about our eleven inch thick walls?

MOLLY

An African elephant has a hearing frequency twenty times lower than humans. Your mother is an African elephant. We won't be having sex while she's roaming through the house searching for watering holes. Please finish stocking your bar. Luckily our guest are running late.

PETER

Claire normally has the bar already stocked and everything in its place.

MOLLY

We gave Claire the night off.

*(MOLLY returns the toolbox to the walk in closet and emerges with a painting. She leans it against the wall.)*

PETER

Why did we give Claire the night off?

MOLLY

Because we're having a cocktail party.

PETER

That's why we hired Claire. She cooks and cleans so our house doesn't look like the people we really are, and she's great at making us look like people who know how to throw wonderful cocktail parties.

MOLLY

Between Claire's hors d'oeuvres, your fabulous martinis and my flower arrangements we will still look like people who know how to throw wonderful cocktail parties. And thank God, the house doesn't look like the people we really are, but I couldn't have her serving our guests tonight.

PETER

So, next week we won't have her vacuum or clean any of the tubs? *(beat)* I'm not on call this weekend. I was looking forward to mixing gin and tonics and trying to fertilize one of your sea turtle eggs.

MOLLY

We won't have time for fertilization this weekend.

PETER

That's what you said last weekend when we were polar bears and the weekend before when we were....

*(PETER can't remember what animal the family was. MOLLY instantly provides the answer.)*

MOLLY

Black-footed ferrets.

PETER

Black-footed ferrets. No wonder everything is going extinct. The animals have stopped making love.

MOLLY

Finish stocking your bar.

PETER

How do we find time to host a cocktail party without the use of our very capable maid, but can't ever find time to have sex?

MOLLY

Household assistant.

PETER

When did Claire get a title change?

MOLLY

Just now. Claire is our household assistant, not our maid. If her name comes up during cocktail conversation, use household assistant.

*(MOLLY climbs the ladder and hangs the painting **The Graduate** by Ernie Barnes on the wall.)*

*(PETER stares at the newly hung painting.)*

PETER

Are we having black people over?

MOLLY

We're having people over.

PETER

But it feels like we're having black people over. You did the same thing when we hosted the president of the NAACP chapter. You gave Claire the night off. Just because we have a black maid doesn't mean she can't offer hors d'oeuvres to other black people. And it doesn't mean we have to start buying black art.

*(MOLLY closes up the step ladder and takes it back to the walk-in closet. She returns to the main room.)*

MOLLY

It's not black art. It's art. And find a different way to describe a group of people other than the color of their skin?

PETER

Claire is more of a smooth mocha.

MOLLY

Go back to saying black people. *(beat)* I think we can host a small cocktail party without the use of our household assistant.

PETER

Maid.

MOLLY

Household assistant.

PETER

Maid.

MOLLY

Household assistant.

PETER

Black maid.

MOLLY

Why are you being horrible?

PETER

Because you're being ridiculous. We have a black maid, Molly. That doesn't make us bad people. It makes us people who have a black maid. A black maid with a matching 401K. A black maid with two weeks paid vacation plus Martin Luther King Jr. day off. A black maid with dental, health and disability insurance. And apparently, a black maid who only works white cocktail parties. Who are we having over for drinks?

MOLLY

Members from Black Lives Matter.

PETER

It might be good we gave our household assistant the night off.

MOLLY

I know how to hold out a plate of hors d'oeuvres.

PETER

When you say members from Black Lives Matter. Is it one Black Lives Matter, two Black Lives Matter, a few Black Lives Matter, or the entire Black Lives Matter movement?  
(beat) Only, so I know how much gin to bring up from the basement.

MOLLY

Jaquan and his plus one.

PETER

I've never heard you mention a Jaquan before.

MOLLY

He's my new Black Lives Matter activist friend that I've been going on and on and on to you about. You've stopped listening to me.

PETER

I've stopped listening to you about delicate sea turtles eggs and under weight polar bears, but my ears would have perked up at, my new Black Lives Matter activist friend.

MOLLY

I talk about Jaquan and his message every time I come home from a Black Lives Matter rally.

PETER

When have you ever come home from a Black Lives Matter rally?

MOLLY

Just last week.

PETER

I don't remember hearing, "Honey, I'm home from the Black Lives Matter rally, and next week we're going to be endangered Galapagos penguins."

MOLLY

Why are you making a big deal out of this? We're open to new ideas.

PETER

No, we're not. We discuss new ideas and then you convince me that we're open to them. Like renovating a brownstone in Harlem, but there was no discussion about joining Black Lives Matter.

MOLLY

We haven't joined Black Lives Matter, but we have a strong interest in finding out more.

PETER

Why do you always get to create we? Whenever I try to create we it never works.

MOLLY

What are you talking about?

PETER

We have a strong interest in going upstairs to screw like rabbits.

MOLLY

Finish stocking your bar.

PETER

That's what I mean. We are throwing a last minute cocktail party. We are going to be western lowland gorillas. We are interested in learning more about Black Lives Matter. When we want to go upstairs to screw like rabbits you tell me to finish stocking my bar.

MOLLY

What's wrong with learning more about Black Lives Matter?

PETER

And we are just going to skip over what I'm really trying to talk to you about.

MOLLY

What is it that you're really trying to talk to me about?

PETER

We, never having sex.

MOLLY

Finish stocking your bar.

PETER

I rest my case. *(beat)* You collect causes, Molly. We don't need another one.

MOLLY

I look for places where my voice is needed. I raised over ten thousand dollars walking in honor of your father surviving prostate cancer. I organize your hospital's Christmas toy drive each year, so three hundred low-income children will wake up with a non-gender conforming toy beneath their tree. I helped to save hundreds of kangaroos during the Australian bushfire season.

*(PETER pulls a different card from the deck to play.)*

PETER

Our house smells like pee.

*(MOLLY sniffs the air.)*

MOLLY

No, it doesn't.

PETER

Take a deeper whiff. Our entire house smells like pee because you want to save the planet.

MOLLY

We don't flush yellow.

PETER

I know. If it's yellow, let it mellow. We have toilet bowls of pee in all four bathrooms.

MOLLY

It's a waste of water to flush a toilet bowl of pee.

PETER

Isn't that why we installed low flow toilets? Your husband would like to flush his yellow.

MOLLY

Us not flushing our low flow toilets makes up for families who can't afford low flow toilets. This neighborhood is still changing. Not everyone is fortunate enough to make updates and renovations in order to cut back on their water usage.

PETER

What was the renovation budget?

MOLLY

Alison says you go back to this argument any time you feel you're not being listened to. I'm listening to you, Peter.

PETER

Do you ever notice that our marriage counselor sides with you more often than she does me? We should try working with a male marriage counselor for a few months to see if Alison has a gender bias. *(Annoyingly slow)* What was our renovation budget?

MOLLY

Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

PETER

And how much did all of your environmentally conscious renovations put us over?



MOLLY

I'm a founding partner of Green Planet Solutions. It would make me look pretty damn shitty if my own house didn't have low flow toilets.

PETER

I'm only asking how much over budget did it cost for you to not look shitty.

MOLLY

Finish stocking your bar. Our guests will be arriving any minute.

PETER

Good. They can finish stocking the goddamn bar. One hundred thousand dollars over budget is the number.

MOLLY

I know the number. You have it etched into my brain.

PETER

Reclaimed doorknobs, reclaimed bricks, reclaimed wood floors.

MOLLY

Reclaimed items saved us money and space in the landfill.

PETER

Motion sensor lights that turn on and off whenever they want to. Sink faucets that shut off after four seconds, shower heads that turn off after five minutes. I leave for the hospital every morning with soap still on my butt.

MOLLY

I'll search for a solution on Answers.Com in the morning.

PETER

For the soap still on my butt or a Harlem brownstone that smells like the A train?

MOLLY

Both.

PETER

Here's a suggestion. Let people flush the toilet, and let your sex starved husband take a fifteen minute shower.

MOLLY

Fifteen minutes? How much soap is still left on your butt?

PETER

It's not the soap still left on my butt that I need the entire fifteen minutes for.

*Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids*

*(MOLLY is disgusted at the realization of what Peter does in the shower.)*

MOLLY

In the shower? Really? *(beat)* Claire has to clean that. We are giving her a raise.

PETER

We should think about you going back to work.

MOLLY

Do you think I'm trying to fill up my day?

PETER

No, but you're filling it up differently than how we had it planned. First, adopt a child in need of a home. Two years later, have a baby of our own. It's three years later and you're saving kangaroos and attending Black Lives Matter rallies.

MOLLY

I'm saving kangaroos because human beings have been terrible to the climate. Bushfires in Australia have killed thousands of them. I'm attending Black Lives Matter rallies because humans beings have been no better to each other. Not to mention, one day we will need to tell Jason what it means for him to be black in America. Something you and I have never been.

PETER

Jason is more of a creamy caramel.

MOLLY

Your stupid jokes make it less and less likely that we will be screwing like crazy whenever we do get around to being Ili Pikas.

PETER

What are Ili Pikas?

MOLLY

An endangered rabbit species found in the mountains of northwest China. That's the best I can do for dwindling rabbit populations.

*(MOLLY removes a book from the bookshelf and hands it to PETER.)*

*(PETER reads the title out loud.)*

PETER

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. I won't have time to read it before our guests arrive.

MOLLY

Open it.

*(PETER opens the book and discovers twelve checks.)*

PETER

There must be seventeen thousand dollars worth of checks in here.

MOLLY

Rebates for all of my environmentally conscious renovations; including our four low-flow toilets.

PETER

Most of these checks are over four or five months old. You've been holding onto these waiting for this exact argument.

*(MOLLY takes back the book and returns it to the bookshelf.)*

MOLLY

Yes, now finish stocking your bar.

PETER

Deposit those please. *(beat)* Why are we talking about Black Lives Matter with a three-year-old?

MOLLY

Three is nine years away from being twelve and thirteen years away from being sixteen.

PETER

Why are you doing math equations?

MOLLY

The police killed a twelve-year-old black boy three weeks ago. They killed a sixteen-year-old boy one month after we moved in.

PETER

The sixteen-year-old held up a grocery store. The twelve-year-old was waving a gun around towards innocent people.

MOLLY

The older boy took a carton of eggs, so he could feed his baby sister. The twelve-year-old was playing inside a park with a toy gun. The police shot them both because they were black boys, not because of a three dollar carton of eggs or a toy gun that looked too real. We are raising a black boy.

PETER

Our son is more than just his color. He'll be fine. We chose the name Jason not Jaquan.

MOLLY

Why would you say something like that? You think it's because of a name?

PETER

I spend sixteen hour days sewing up black boys with names I need to be told how to pronounce: DeVante, LaMar, Rahsaan. It's not only white cops putting them there. Most times it's other black boys and none of them are named Bob or Steve.

MOLLY

Maybe there's just more DeVantes, LaMars and Rahsaans being born into poverty and a system that's designed to have them growing up shooting at each other. Bob and Steve grew up in your neighborhood with a weekly allowance and a refrigerator full of food. And sometimes they still knock over the corner liquor store. They just don't show Bob and Steve on the six o'clock news. Tell me you don't really believe it's because of a name.

PETER

You're right. I'm sorry. It's not about a name. I see a lot of young black men dying and I don't have time to figure out why. I barely have enough time to try and save them.

*(DOORBELL RINGS.)*

PETER (cont'd)

That's our guests. Forgive your dumb husband so we can become that couple who throw wonderful cocktail parties.

*(MOLLY softens from PETER'S sincerity and kisses him on the cheek.)*

MOLLY

Don't talk about my husband like that.

*(MOLLY and PETER walk to the front door landing. MOLLY opens the door.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

Shemeka!

*(SHAMEKA enters. She carries a gift bag with a bottle inside.)*

SHAMEKA

Sorry I'm late. Who would have thought liquor stores would go extinct in Harlem? It took over fifteen minutes to find one. It seems like overnight they all turned into a Starbucks, Whole Foods or a Baby Gap. I'm surprised they haven't turned the Apollo into a Dave & Busters yet. But at least you can get a taxi to take you from midtown to Harlem now. This must be Peter. It's nice to meet you.

PETER

Hi.

SHAMEKA

Molly talks about you all the time. Not as much the melting ice caps, but she mentions you a lot. Would you mind helping me with my coat?

PETER

No, not at all. Must still be freezing out.

*(PETER helps SHAMEKA out of her coat and hangs it up inside the closet.)*

SHAMEKA

February in New York is never nice.

PETER

Shameka. Is that Nigerian?

SHAMEKA

Hebrew.

PETER

I would have never guessed.

SHAMEKA

Neither would my mother. She was in search of her African roots. She was a tiny bit off. Although, there is a book called "Jews of Nigeria - An Afro-Judaic Odyssey." It talks about an Israelite ancestry in Nigeria. Maybe we weren't always Southern Baptist.

MOLLY

I love your name. It sounds powerful. Shameka!

SHAMEKA

*(scanning PETER)*

He's not bad looking.

PETER

Thanks. I'm fresh out of the shower.

SHAMEKA

I'll relax a bit about meeting your friend Jaquan.

*(SHAMEKA holds out the gift bag for PETER to take.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

I brought this for the bar.

PETER

Thank you.

*(PETER pulls out a bottle of Aizé from the gift bag. He examines the label as he walks it over to the bar. MOLLY and SHAMEKA make their way into the main room.)*

PETER (cont'd)

*(butchering the pronunciation)*

Alazéé.

SHAMEKA

*(correcting PETER)*

Alizé.

MOLLY

It was sweet of you to bring something.

SHAMEKA

I don't normally run in asking to use someone's bathroom, like I don't have one at home. But searching for a liquor store threw off the timing of my bladder. Would you mind pointing me to your ladies room?

*(PETER and MOLLY bombard SHAMEKA with instructions.)*

MOLLY

There's fresh towels in the guest bathroom--

PETER

It's through the left archway.

*(SHAMEKA heads off towards the bathroom.)*

MOLLY

It's the second door on your right.

PETER

Jason's room is the first.

MOLLY

He should be asleep, but feel free to peek in.

PETER

The motion sensor lights come up by themselves.

MOLLY

Hopefully.

PETER

They seem to turn off whenever they want to, so wave your arms around every few seconds after you sit down.

*(SHAMEKA exits.)*

MOLLY

Don't flush yellow.

*(PETER inspects the bottle of Alizé.)*

PETER

What do you do with Alazée-zée?

MOLLY

Alizé. I'm not sure, but it's a pretty color.

PETER

So we know a Shameka.

MOLLY

We didn't get around to the entire guest list.

PETER

Should I be looking forward to meeting Al Sharpton?

MOLLY

No, but you did just meet Shameka Davis. She works at a bookstore a few blocks from the house. We became instant friends after a long discussion about how wonderful Maya Angelou was. She's recommended so many African-American writers for me to read. Our other guest will be Jaquan Wallace. I gave him a plus one, so he could bring his friend Tom, and I invited Rita Dupree. They're all wonderful people.

PETER

Jaquan and Rita might be wonderful people, but you have no idea who this Tom is.

MOLLY

Our last cocktail party everyone received a plus one.

PETER

Our last cocktail party was for a group trying to save the honey bee. Most of them brought a beekeeper and an empty honey jar to show us what life without honey bees would look like.

MOLLY

Didn't we just go through this?

PETER

Not the guest list.

MOLLY

Jaquan only surrounds himself with like minded people.

PETER

That's what I'm afraid of. You saw what happened during those protest marches. There were a lot of angry black people in those crowds and they seemed to be angry at white people.

*(MOLLY corrects PETER'S terminology.)*

MOLLY

African-American.

PETER

What?



MOLLY

Shameka is right down the hall. I think we should be using African-American.

PETER

There were a lot of angry African-American people in those crowds and they seemed to be angry at-- Can I still say white people?

MOLLY

Non-people of color.

PETER

This is why we needed Claire tonight. She would know what black people call white people and what black people want white people to call them. What do we call Claire when she's not in the room?

MOLLY

Claire.

PETER

There were a lot of angry Claire people in those crowds and they seemed to be angry at--

MOLLY

We are not using Claire's name as a replacement for describing black people as black people. That's more offensive than saying black people.

PETER

I was joking. This entire conversation was bordering on ridiculous: white, black, African-American, non-people of color, green, red, yellow. I was only adding to it. You're being overly-sensitive about my jokes tonight.

MOLLY

Because people don't get your jokes.

PETER

Oh, that hurts.

MOLLY

Would you please stop? What Jaquan stands for means something to me.

PETER

I can see that, but I'm being cautious.

MOLLY

The violence that happened during those protest marches didn't start with Black Lives Matter. Jaquan is non-violent. I trust his judgement on whoever he wants to bring into our house.

PETER

I'm afraid to ask who Rita Dupree is.

MOLLY

Maybe you should sit down.

PETER

Maybe I should start drinking the Alazéen.

MOLLY

Alizé. Why can't you get that?

PETER

Alizé.

MOLLY

Was it that hard?

PETER

Yes.

MOLLY

Rita Dupree is Elijah Dupree's mother.

PETER

That's the twelve-year-old boy killed inside the park. You invited a grieving mother to a cocktail party?

MOLLY

Jaquan has been trying to reach out to her, but she hasn't responded.

PETER

But she responded to an invite to a cocktail party.

MOLLY

I knocked at her door. She lives just a few streets over. Meeting with Jaquan and having the support of Black Lives Matter is what she needs. It doesn't matter where they meet. That's if she comes. She's still in a lot of pain.

MOLLY (cont'd)

Most of our visit was spent with her wanting to hold Jason. He wouldn't go to her. Do you think we need to expose him to more African-Americans?

PETER

Claire.

MOLLY

No, we are not using Claire as a replacement for African-American. We are not those kind of people.

PETER

No, Claire. Jason sees Claire every day. Maybe he didn't want to go to a stranger. It could be a hundred different reasons, but her being African-American isn't one of them.

*(DOORBELL RINGS.)*

PETER (cont'd)

That's either Rita Dupree or Jaquan and his Black Panther plus one.

*(MOLLY heads towards the front door.)*

MOLLY

You made his friend a Black Panther. Is that where you landed?

PETER

That's what I've heard.

MOLLY

*(sarcastic)*

Tom the Black Panther.

PETER

Just a few minutes ago you said we couldn't judge people by their names. So, yes. Tom the Black Panther.

MOLLY

I've attended two Black Lives Matter rallies and the Black Panthers never came up.

*(PETER runs to catch up to MOLLY as she advances towards the front door landing. PETER stops MOLLY'S progress by grabbing her arm.)*

PETER

Whoa! You've only been around Jaquan twice and his friend Tom, never. You can't invite strangers into our house.

MOLLY

Invitations to our cocktail parties are free flowing whenever the guests stand a good chance of looking like the two of us.

PETER

Do we really need to be a part of this?

MOLLY

I want to choose Black Lives Matter before it chooses us.

PETER

Jason is only three.

*(SHAMEKA appears in the left archway. She goes unnoticed by PETER and MOLLY.)*

MOLLY

Rita Dupree showed me a photo of Elijah when he was three. He and Jason could have been brothers.

PETER

You say the same thing about polar bears and every wild animal on the planet.

*(DOORBELL RINGS twice.)*

SHAMEKA

Would you like me to get that?

*(PETER and MOLLY are caught off guard by Shameka's presence.)*

PETER

No, we got it.

MOLLY

No, thank you.

MOLLY

*(an aside to PETER)*

We may not even get around to discussing Black Lives Matter. Jaquan and Tom might spend the entire night fighting for Shameka's affections. I saw how you looked at her.

PETER

How did I look at her?

MOLLY

Like you could use a fifteen minute shower.

*(PETER walks to the door and opens it.)*

PETER

I hope you're Jaquan.

JAQUAN

I hope you're Peter.

PETER

Molly's husband.

JAQUAN

Molly's friend.

PETER

Please, come in.

*(JAQUAN steps into the house.)*

JAQUAN

Thank you. It's freezing out.

PETER

February in New York is never nice.

*(MOLLY rushes to JAQUAN and hugs him like her best summer camp buddy.)*

MOLLY

It's so good to see you, Jaquan.

JAQUAN

It's good to see you too, Molly. I've heard great things about you, Peter.

MOLLY

Where's your plus one?

JAQUAN

Outside debating with the Uber driver over the Civil Rights Movement. We've been parked for ten minutes. They were up to 1963 and the Birmingham Children's Crusade. He'll find his way in.

PETER

*(an aside to MOLLY)*

Black Panthers. *(to JAQUAN)* Let me take your coat.

JAQUAN

Thank you.

*(PETER hangs up the coat in the closet.)*

MOLLY

Come inside. I want you to meet a friend.

*(MOLLY leads JAQUAN into the main room. PETER heads for the bar.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

Shameka, this is the very handsome Jaquan that I've been wanting to introduce you to.

JAQUAN

It's nice to meet you, Shameka.

SHAMEKA

Likewise. *(an aside to MOLLY)* Good job.

PETER

How about we get started by taking a look at the cocktail menu?

*(TOM enters through the front door.)*

TOM

Sorry, I got delayed.

*(JAQUAN walks over to the front door landing and TOM.)*

JAQUAN

Who won the great Uber debate?

TOM

I did of course. How could anyone say America didn't have race problems before the Civil Rights Movement? And coming from a brotha. And then he wanted to bad mouth the Black Panthers. I was surprised you didn't say anything.

JAQUAN

I did. I said, excuse me, Brotha. You drove passed the address. "A wise man told me don't argue with fools. Cause people from a distance can't tell who is who." That's Jay-Z.

TOM

Are you saying I'm a fool?

JAQUAN

No, Blue Ivy's daddy is saying it.

*(PETER and MOLLY make their way over to greet TOM. SHAMEKA remains in the main room, allowing Peter and Molly to welcome their new guest. SHAMEKA loses herself in the titles on the bookshelf.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

Molly and Peter this is my plus one.

TOM

Also known as Tom.

MOLLY

Welcome to our home, Tom.

*(PETER shakes TOM'S hand.)*

PETER

Molly's husband. I'm glad it's you-- I'm glad to meet you. Let me take your coat.

TOM

Jaquan's partner. *(beat)* I'll take care of my coat. It's the price of being late.

*(TOM spots the closet and hangs up his coat inside.)*

PETER

What business are you two in?

*(TOM emerges from the closet.)*

TOM

The business of sleeping together. *(beat)* Fantastic closet.

*(SHAMEKA overhears TOM'S remark and whirls around towards the front door landing. She now listens intently.)*

PETER

I think my wife might have missed that.

TOM

I'm sure it's not her fault. Jaquan thinks his homosexuality is as obvious as his blackness. It's not until I show up that he's reminded that it's not.

JAQUAN

No, my argument is that I shouldn't have to announce my sexuality every time I meet a new person. Peter didn't introduced himself as a heterosexual.

TOM

He introduced himself as Molly's husband, which more than implies that they are both card carrying heterosexuals. Me saying I'm your partner clearly confuses some card carrying heterosexuals.

JAQUAN

I think they might prefer being called Peter and Molly.

PETER

No, we don't mind being called card carrying heterosexuals. Molly, why don't you go introduce Tom to Shameka and let the battle for her affections begin. I should get a few more bottles for the bar.

*(Not wanting to be found eavesdropping, SHAMEKA quickly returns to scanning the titles on the bookshelf.)*

*(PETER heads back into the main room ahead of MOLLY, JAQUAN and TOM.)*

TOM

Affections?

MOLLY

No one ever gets my husband's jokes.



*Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids*

*(PETER whispers to SHAMEKA as he passes on his way to the kitchen.)*

PETER

You might need something stronger than Alizé. I'll be back with the remedy.

*(PETER exits.)*

*(SHAMEKA steps away from the bookshelf as the trio of MOLLY, JAQUAN and TOM enter into the main room.)*

MOLLY

Tom, let me introduce you to my best friend. Shameka, I'd like you to meet Jaquan's **PARTNER**. Who I only learned about a few seconds ago.

JAQUAN

Tom and I are homosexuals together. In case Molly emphasizing partner didn't imply it.

MOLLY

Did I emphasize?

TOM

You emphasized.

SHAMEKA

I thought I overheard someone ripping the pages out of my Cinderella storybook.

MOLLY

I'm sorry, everyone. There's been a mistake. Let me take the blame and fix it.

TOM

No need. We have it. You thought Jaquan was attractive, unattached and dated women. He is. He's not. He doesn't.

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

I can speak for myself?

SHAMEKA

Even if he was, I still don't see myself being in the race.

TOM

No pun intended?

JAQUAN

Tom, I'm standing right here. (to SHAMEKA) No pun intended?

*(SHAMEKA doesn't offer a response to JAQUAN'S question. She calls out to PETER, in the other room, as she walks over to the bar.)*

SHAMEKA

I'm ready for the cocktail part of this party, Peter. Let's drink.

MOLLY

*(to JAQUAN and TOM)*

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have assumed. Please forgive me.

JAQUAN

It's not a big deal. You didn't know.

TOM

Because you didn't tell her. (to MOLLY) Did Jaquan ask for a plus one for his friend or for his partner?

MOLLY

Friend. Sorry, Jaquan.

JAQUAN

I'll make sure I say partner next time. Tie a rainbow flag around my waist and bring all my James Baldwin novels.

*(PETER enters with two bottles of Gin.)*

PETER

Shameka, allow me to introduce you to the benefits of Gin. It's been said that English soldiers were provided Jenever for its calming effects before battles--

SHAMEKA

With the Spanish during the Eighty Years' War.

PETER

Impressive. Let's hope tonight won't be as long but the Gin just as calming.

SHAMEKA

I'm here for all of that.

*(SLEEPY CRIES OF MOMMY, MOMMY come from the baby monitor. TOM picks it up from the accent cabinet.)*

TOM

Jaquan didn't say you two had a baby.

PETER

We don't. He's a sea turtle.

TOM

Kids have the best imaginations. I was always Xena Warrior Princess. (beat) How old is he?

*(MOLLY picks up a framed photo of Jason from the accent cabinet and exchanges it for the baby monitor in TOM'S hands.)*

MOLLY

Jason just turned three. He came to us at four weeks old. We weren't ready at all.

PETER

We got bumped to the front of the list ahead of two other couples.

MOLLY

We call it fate.

TOM

He's beautiful.

MOLLY

And probably wet. Potty training isn't going well.

PETER

It's easier with the second one.

MOLLY

*(to PETER)*

Explain the evening to everyone while I go check on our son. I'll be right back.

*(MOLLY exits.)*

TOM

*(an aside to JAQUAN)*

Did you know they had a black baby?

*(PETER overhears TOM and corrects the terminology.)*

PETER

African-American, please.

TOM

Just surprised.

SHAMEKA

I want to gobble Jason up every time I see him. He's a cutie pie.

JAQUAN

Molly seems to love being a mother. Destiny.

PETER

Destiny will have me as the out of shape dad screaming from the bleachers at his basketball games.

TOM

What if he wants to dance?

PETER

We would discuss it.

TOM

What's there to discuss?

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Tap, jazz or modern. Let's leave Jason as a three year-old for a little while longer. Not every answer needs to be cross-examined.

*(PETER hands each of his guest a 5 x 7 cocktail menu.)*

PETER

Our cocktail parties work a lot like a wine tasting. Tonight we have a selection of three martinis to sample from: a Classic Martini, a Jack Frost Martini and, because I love the name, a Filthy Sopping-Wet Martini.

*(PETER pulls out an egg timer from below the bar and places it on top.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Whenever the timer goes off we put down our drinks and move on to sampling the next choice. It's democratic vote on which martini we start with, or we can go off script. Shameka brought Alizé. I can honestly say I've never tried it.

TOM

I can honestly say I believe you.

PETER

Alexa, suggest a drink made with Alizé?

ALEXA (V.O.)

Playing Thug Passion by Tupac Shakur.

*(THUG PASSION by Tupac Shakur fills the room.)*

*(SHAMEKA and TOM immediately bop to the music.)*

TOM

Tupac!

SHAMEKA

Tupac!

*(SHAMEKA instantly feels TOM has no right to Tupac and shoots him an unappreciative look.)*

*(PETER is embarrassed by Alexa's mistake.)*

PETER

Alexa, stop.

*(The music stops.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Sorry. Sorry, everyone. I don't know how that happened. Let's stay with the drink menu.

JAQUAN

I'll have a Coke.

PETER

That's not staying with the drink menu.

JAQUAN

Would you mind if we add it?

PETER

No, but it gives the bartender little to do and changes the entire concept of a cocktail party.

JAQUAN

You can pour it into a martini glass.

PETER

I'll make the adjustment. How about you, Tom?

TOM

Harlem water.

PETER

You two are going to have me rethinking the money I spent on my bar.

SHAMEKA

Your money won't be wasted over here. How's your Dirty Martini?

PETER

That's Molly's favorite. It's been a while since she's had it, but she says I know what I'm doing.

SHAMEKA

Well, let's not deprive Molly any longer.

PETER

One Coke, a Harlem water and three Dirty Martinis coming up.

*(PETER works on preparing the drinks.)*

*(SHAMEKA, JAQUAN and TOM take in the room.)*

JAQUAN

Your money wasn't wasted, Peter. It's a beautiful bar. It looks like something out of a Lana Turner classic.

PETER

Fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy night.

TOM

That's Bette Davis. *(beat)* Do you know any gay people?

JAQUAN

Excuse Tom. It's been a while since we've been in a non-confrontational room. He's out of practice, and it doesn't help that he knows every movie reference from the iconic to the obscure.

SHAMEKA

See if you can find a copy of *Imitation of Life*, Peter. That's a classic Lana Turner movie for you. A beautiful Broadway star ascends to the heights of fame while her daughter is raised by their dark skin maid.

PETER

*(correcting SHAMEKA)*

Household assistant.

SHAMEKA

Ummm, okay. The household assistant is raising her own daughter as well. She's a beautiful, light skin girl with naturally straight hair. She spends the entire movie denying her blackness, running away from her mother, and trying to pass as white. Any of that feel familiar, Jaquan?

JAQUAN

No, but you do have me beat on Lana Turner movies.

SHAMEKA

I've watched it more than six times.

PETER

Why so many?

SHAMEKA

Research for a book I'm writing.

JAQUAN

What's it about?

SHAMEKA

The struggles of black actresses in early Hollywood. I got the idea from reading my great-grandmother's diaries. She was in a lot of movies from the early forties right up until she died.

TOM

Anything we would have seen her in?

SHAMEKA

It's A Wonderful Life.

PETER

With Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed? Really? Who was she?

SHAMEKA

The household assistant.

TOM

Maids, porters, butlers, and chauffeurs. Early Hollywood could have done a lot better with the roles they gave our black talent.

SHAMEKA

My great-grandmother playing a maid wasn't the problem. Domestic work was real, and graduated a lot of doctors and lawyers. The problem was with the lines they wrote for her as an actress and how she had to deliver them.

TOM

Is that the scene near the end? Everyone rallies around George and donates money to stop him from being dragged off to jail, right?

SHAMEKA

That's it.

JAQUAN

I tried to warn you.

*(TOM bucks out his eyes and delivers the line as a caricature of a slow, smiling happy Negro of the forties, as in the movie.)*

TOM

I been savin' this money for a divorce if ever I get a husband.

*(JAQUAN buries his head into his hands from embarrassment that Tom went all out with the impression.)*

SHAMEKA

Sounds even worse coming from a middle aged gay white man.



TOM

Middle aged?

JAQUAN

It sounds like a much needed book. Good luck with it.

PETER

Put my family down for three advance copies.

JAQUAN

Add me to that list.

SHAMEKA

I'll have them waiting for you at my book signing. It's going to be fantastic. That's one of the perks of running your own bookstore. I can plan the book signing before I even finish the book.

JAQUAN

Nice. A sister with her own business. How long have you had it?

SHAMEKA

My dad owned it for over thirty years. Every storefront on our block has gone from being a beauty parlor to a candy shop to a clothing store and back to a beauty parlor again, but the Frederick Douglass has always been a black owned, black operated, black bookstore.

*(TOM raises a black power fist.)*

TOM

I'm loving all that black.

SHAMEKA

He passed away two years ago. I couldn't let it close.

JAQUAN

I used to spend half of my day inside the Frederick Douglass. I guess it's been a while. Knowing that I couldn't afford to buy many books. Your dad would tell me to hold onto the receipt so I could exchange it for a new one.

SHAMEKA

He did that for a lot of people in the neighborhood. I still do it. I think it would make him happy.

JAQUAN

I'm sure it would. Sorry to hear he passed.

SHAMEKA

Thank you.

TOM

*(to JAQUAN)*

Is that the bookstore you sometimes talk about?

JAQUAN

It's the same one.

PETER

I completely missed Molly saying you owned a bookstore.

SHAMEKA

So has Molly. I've learned more about under weight polar bears than she's learned about me. But don't get me wrong, I don't mind her visits to my bookstore.

PETER

Don't get me wrong, but I don't mind her visits to your bookstore, either.

*(SHAMEKA and PETER share a laugh.)*

*(PETER presents his three guests their requested drinks. He has his own martini and places another one on the bar for MOLLY'S return.)*

PETER (cont'd)

A toast to new friends.

*(PETER, JAQUAN and TOM raise their glasses. SHAMEKA bypasses the toast and begins to drink.)*

PETER / JAQUAN / TOM

To new friends.

*(MOLLY enters.)*

MOLLY

You can't have a toast without me.

PETER

The toast was to new friends. You already know everyone here.

MOLLY

Except for Tom. *(an aside to PETER)* Black Panthers, remember?

*(TOM hands MOLLY her martini.)*

TOM

To new friends.

MOLLY

To new friends. What did I miss?

PETER

You not telling me that Tom and Jaquan don't drink.

MOLLY

I had no idea. I hope we didn't offend you. It's just that most of our friends relax more with a cocktail in their hands.

TOM

Most of your friends are probably white and come in from the suburbs.

PETER

A few of our friends are white and come in from Hoboken, but don't let that get out.

MOLLY

Well, we did just toast to new friends. Please accept our apologies about the alcohol.

JAQUAN

What Tom was trying to say is I don't drink knowing that I have to walk back out into Harlem. I don't need my reflexes or judgement to be impaired. Tom has his own reasons, but don't let us spoil the evening.

*(JAQUAN raises his glass.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

You pour a great Coca-Cola, Peter.

PETER

I thought crime rates have been dropping since--

TOM

Gentrification.

PETER

I was going to say since a lot of the old buildings have been renovated and occupied, but fair enough. Molly and I both agree that resources shouldn't start flowing into a neighborhood just because a certain demographic has now moved in.

TOM

You mean white people.

PETER

Non-people of color.

TOM

White people.

PETER

Every neighborhood deserves--

TOM

White people.

PETER

That's not what I'm saying. Every neighborhood deserves a Chase Manhattan bank and a Whole Foods. It shouldn't depend on who lives there.

*(SHAMEKA raises her glass in a toast.)*

SHAMEKA

Thank you Peter and Molly for bringing fresh fruits and vegetables back to Harlem.

JAQUAN

And a new elementary school, two new--

TOM

Playgrounds, a Shake Shack--

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Let me finish a sentence.

TOM

Sure.

JAQUAN

Two new playgrounds, a Shake Shack, three pharmacies, an urgent care, brighter street lights and a more consistent trash pickup.

TOM

All things that were needed before Neil Patrick Harris moved in.

PETER

But to my point, crime has dropped in the time that Molly and I've lived here. How long until you start to feel safe in SoHa?

*(SHAMEKA, JAQUAN and TOM bristle at PETER renaming Harlem.)*

SHAMEKA

Oh, hell no. We are not doing that. I don't care how fresh the fruits and vegetables are at Whole Foods. We are not changing the name of Harlem to SoHa.

MOLLY

But it's short and catchy. It's a great marketing tool to get young families interested in the neighborhood again. It's like SoHo. Who doesn't want to live in SoHo?

PETER

You didn't.

TOM

You get to name things you discover. Shake Shack and these million dollar real estate companies didn't discover Harlem. A beautiful vibrant community has always been here. They just didn't want any part of us before.

PETER

Beautiful and vibrant doesn't go along with Jaquan not wanting his reflexes to be impaired while walking the streets of SoHa-- Harlem.

JAQUAN

Harlem isn't the problem. It's the policing of it that's a threat to me. Cops used to stop me for being a suspicious black man walking the streets of Harlem. Now they stop me for being a suspicious black man who shouldn't be walking the streets of SoHa. Implicit bias lives in both of them.

TOM

Racism. Implicit bias is a benign phrase to make white people feel better.

SHAMEKA

I'm completely confused by the two of you.

JAQUAN

I'm not trying to make white people feel better, but if I say racism they shut down. If I say implicit bias, I get four more minutes before they shut down. Most times I need to enter the room differently than you.

*(TOM puts an arm around JAQUAN'S waist.)*

TOM

We're saying the same thing. It really doesn't matter the term we use. Cops are still practicing stop and frisk on the streets of Harlem.

*(JAQUAN gently breaks free of TOM'S embrace.)*

SHAMEKA

Is that something you know from experience?

TOM

No, but that's the problem with stop and frisk. My skin color allows me to walk past a cop without the presumption of guilt. I'm speaking from countless stories I've heard from men I've dated.

SHAMEKA

Black men.

TOM

Men of color.

SHAMEKA

Racial profiling shows up in a lot of different forms.

TOM

I've always dated whoever I was attracted to.

SHAMEKA

With more of that attraction directed towards black men.

TOM

Yes.

SHAMEKA

The same way police stop and frisk.

TOM

We live in a city that's a melting pot. Don't you want to taste all the flavors?

JAQUAN

Flavors?

SHAMEKA

My mother has placed her order. I better not bring home anything different. Her future son-in-law better taste like chocolate.

PETER

Are us vanilla guys all that bad?

SHAMEKA

I haven't sampled.

TOM

This might be a good time for you to say something, Jaquan.

PETER

You too, Molly. Tell Shameka about us vanilla guys.

MOLLY

They're good. *(beat)* But I've had different.

PETER

What?

MOLLY

I've sampled.

PETER

When?

TOM

Say something, Jaquan.

*(PETER is bewildered by MOLLY'S comment and works to process this new information as the others move on.)*

JAQUAN

The only flavors I'd like to sample are sitting over there on those pretty trays. Do you mind if I help myself, Molly?

MOLLY

No, you will not help yourself. I've completely forgotten how to be a hostess. You are the guest.

*(MOLLY retrieves a tray of hors d'oeuvres from the buffet table and offers them to her guests.)*

PETER

*(to MOLLY)*

Sampled when?

MOLLY

Freshman year. We can talk about it later.

*(JAQUAN, SHAMEKA and TOM take a hors d'oeuvres and pop it into their mouths.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

You're going to love them. Each one is different.

JAQUAN

That was delicious.

SHAMEKA

This took me back to my grandmother's kitchen.

JAQUAN

Did I taste candied yams in there?

SHAMEKA

Mine was mac-n-cheese.

TOM

I couldn't tell.

*(PETER continues his inquisition of MOLLY.)*

PETER

You were dating me your freshman year.

MOLLY

It was the month we broke up.

PETER

We broke up for five days.



MOLLY

And that's when I sampled. *(beat)* Have an hors d'oeuvres. They're delicious.

*(MOLLY stuffs an hors d'oeuvres into PETER'S mouth just as he opens it to say something else. MOLLY puts down the tray.)*

*(SHAMEKA scoops up three hors d'oeuvres from the tray. She tosses one to TOM and pushes one into JAQUAN'S mouth and then one into her own. The three try to determine the contents.)*

SHAMEKA

Collard greens.

JAQUAN

Fried chicken.

TOM

Nothing.

JAQUAN

You can't taste that?

SHAMEKA

Everything is wrapped up inside the sweetest tasting mini-cornbread pastry.

JAQUAN

It's like a tiny Sunday dinner--

SHEEMEKA

At black people's houses.

JAQUAN

At black people's houses.

*(SHAMEKA and JAQUAN laugh at the shared experience.)*

SHAMEKA

Molly, are you passing?

MOLLY

Passing for what?

JAQUAN

She's not passing.

SHEEMEKA

She's not passing.

*(JAQUAN and SHAMEKA laugh at the inside joke.)*

TOM

Passing for what?

SHAMEKA

Neither is Tom. *(to TOM)* Imitation of Life with Lana Turner. You'll find some great lines to memorize.

MOLLY

Our household assistant made them.

SHAMEKA

You have a black maid?

PETER

*(correcting SHAMEKA)*

African-American household assistant.

MOLLY

Does that make us bad people?

SHAMEKA

It makes you people who have a black maid.

PETER

*(correcting SHAMEKA)*

African-American household assistant.

MOLLY

You know what I mean.

SHAMEKA

No, I don't. Do you pay her?

PETER

Claire has a matching 401K, two weeks paid vacation plus Martin Luther King Jr. day off and a bathroom where she doesn't have to flush yellow.

JAQUAN

I need Claire's recipe in my life. Is she here? Is she in the kitchen?

SHAMEKA

You cook?

JAQUAN

I've been known to throw down a little.

TOM

Jaquan throws down more than a little. He's an excellent chef.

JAQUAN

I'm not saying all that.

TOM

He cooked for me on our first date. It was the most romantic evening I've ever spent on a Harlem roof top.

SHAMEKA

There's three pigeon coops on top of my roof. Pigeon shit all over the place. I wouldn't take a crackhead up there.

MOLLY

We gave Claire the night off.

SHAMEKA

Why? Is it Martin Luther King Jr. day?

MOLLY

She's been working really hard and this was all last minute.

SHAMEKA

You were afraid we would judge you.

PETER

Molly didn't want to make anybody feel uncomfortable.

SHAMEKA

A person doing a job they were hired to do wouldn't make me feel uncomfortable.

MOLLY

Even though she's black-- African-American.

PETER

Claire is more of a smooth mocha.

SHAMEKA

Now that makes me feel uncomfortable, but a black person serving me wouldn't. She's your maid.

PETER

Household assistant.

SHAMEKA

If I had a white maid, I wouldn't give her the night off because white people were coming over. What do you and Peter do when you have a white waitress? Go back to the kitchen and bring out your own food?

MOLLY

You're right. I don't know why I was seeing it differently.

PETER

Claire does a wonderful job taking care of our family.

SHAMEKA

Does Claire know your house smells like pee?

TOM

Is that what that is?

PETER

We don't flush yellow.

TOM

It smells like the A train.

MOLLY

I'm searching Answers.com for a solution.

JAQUAN

It's not that noticeable. Really.

*(An uncomfortable silence falls over the room.)*

PETER

Why can't I say smooth mocha?

TOM

Because you can't.

MOLLY

Because you can't.

SHAMEKA

The white people have spoken.

JAQUAN

We don't need you assigning a shade to our blackness.

*(PETER goes to the bookshelf and pulls out **Devil in a Blue Dress** and waves it above his head as evidence.)*

PETER

Walter Mosley.

SHAMEKA

And.....

PETER

I found one of his books in the hospital cafeteria. I picked it up and couldn't put it back down. Walter Mosley writes about black people, but he never describes them as black. The women he falls in love with have cinnamon colored skin, and the men he fights have skin the color of freshly poured tar.

TOM

You're not Walter Mosley.

PETER

I don't need to be Walter Mosley to make an observation about the color of someone's skin. Shameka is the color of honey when it's dripping from a hive and just catches a ray of the afternoon sun. *(Alternate depending on the actress's skin tone)* Shameka is the color of a moonless sky over the plains of Wyoming when all the clouds have been blown away and there's not a single star to be found.

SHAMEKA

*(surprised and flattered)*

Well, damn. How many Walter Mosley books have you read?

TOM

*(confrontational)*

Do me.

PETER

JAQUAN

White.

White.

*(PETER and JAQUAN share a laugh.)*

MOLLY

*(to JAQUAN)*

Do you mind if I ask how you and Tom met?

TOM

Jaquan is no longer allowed to tell that story.

JAQUAN

Since when?

TOM

Since just now.

MOLLY

Sounds interesting.

TOM

Shameka, tell us more about the book you're writing. Hattie McDaniel and Ethel Waters must show up a lot.

SHAMEKA

They do, but Hattie McDaniel and Ethel Waters won't be saving you tonight. Let's hear how you two met. It might help with my chapter on Beah Richards and Isabel Sanford.

*(TOM immediately takes offense to Shameka's not so subtle jab at his and Jaquan's interracial relationship.)*

TOM

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. Really? You want to take it there?

JAQUAN

Let it go, Tom.

TOM

Okay, but she got one mo' time.

MOLLY

If you're not comfortable, we can leave it alone.

TOM

Go ahead.

*(JAQUAN fondly retells the story.)*

JAQUAN

Tom and I first met four years ago. I was having dinner with three beautiful, fabulous, well educated sisters. There was a lot of great food - deep conversation - positive vibes. A drunk out of his mind white boy, cute white boy, comes stumbling over to our table. He stares at the four of us and decides to educate us on soul music. He starts shouting at the top of his lungs about a song playing throughout the restaurant.

JAQUAN (cont'd)

Keep in mind this came from a very intoxicated man. (*imitating an intoxicated Tom*) “Do you know who the fuck is singing right now? Do you understand the significance this woman’s voice had on R&B music? We should all bow down in this damn restaurant and say thank you. All hail the Queen of Soul.” (*back to himself*) It was Amy Winehouse.

(*PETER and SHAMEKA respond with laughter. TOM winces from embarrassment. MOLLY comforts.*)

MOLLY

I loved Amy Winehouse too, Tom.

JAQUAN

My three beautiful, fabulous, well educated sisters started taking off their earrings. They were ready to leap over our table and bow down all over this misguided, drunk-ass, cute, white boy. So I did this drunk man the favor of pouring him into the backseat of a taxi. I stuck my business card in his pocket and asked him to call me when he made it home. Tom called a year later.

MOLLY

An entire year?

PETER

How far away did he live?

SHAMEKA

Was it his verbal abuse or the racial superiority that first attracted you to this drunk-ass, cute, white boy?

JAQUAN

I wasn’t tripping off of Tom. I spent my junior high school years surrounded by white dudes like him. They watched every episode of Martin and thought they knew my life. They would grab my hand and nearly break it trying to do some complicated soul shake. I asked for a phone call to make sure the cabbie hadn’t tossed him into the East River and drove off with my fifty bucks. Learning why it took Tom a year to call is what made me want to cook for him. But it wasn’t a date.

TOM

That’s the first time you’ve ever said it wasn’t a date.

JAQUAN

Because it wasn’t. Dinner on the rooftop wasn’t my idea of being romantic. It was August in New York, and the AC was out. We would have melted inside that apartment.

SHAMEKA

So why did it take him a year to call?

JAQUAN

This is where I should ask permission to continue.

TOM

Jaquan is always too kind when he talks about the first night we met. Alcohol wasn't my only problem. Jaquan met a drug addict that night. I still am. I'm just not using. Crystal meth was my drug of choice, but I wouldn't turn my nose up at anything being passed around. He gave the cab driver the address off of my license. It wasn't current. It was to my parents' apartment on Fifth Ave.

MOLLY

Are you a Rockefeller or a Vanderbilt?

TOM

One of the lesser known families. Poor little rich kids who either overdose or jump off the Manhattan Bridge for their 25th birthdays. Mummy and daddy had long ago given up on their privileged gay young son, but I woke up in one of their bedrooms with Jaquan's business card in my hand. A few hours later, I was being chauffeured off to a drug rehab. It was some converted mansion in Upstate. All the shrubbery had been clipped and shaped into characters from Alice in Wonderland. Not good for someone coming down from a crystal meth high. It was the last chance being given to a disobedient heir. My parents always thought I would get clean from threats of losing out on their Faberge Eggs or the Jackson Pollock hanging over the fireplace. Jaquan's business card is the reason I got clean. I wanted to be able to tell him that his mistake saved my life. It felt dramatic. Like a movie Barbara Stanwyck would fight the studios to make. Mummy and daddy love him. Jaquan is probably getting the Jackson Pollock.

*(TOM wraps his arms around JAQUAN'S waist and kisses the back of his neck.)*

JAQUAN

Your parents love everybody.

*(JAQUAN gently breaks free of TOM'S embrace.)*

TOM

No, it's only been a few years of them just coming around to liking me.

JAQUAN

That's not true, and you got clean because you were ready. It had nothing to do with me.



TOM

It had everything to do with him. Jaquan gets more presents from my parents at Christmas than I do. *(pause)* We hit a bump after our first year together. I relapsed, but Jaquan came back and got me through it. He's probably getting all the Faberge Eggs too.

JAQUAN

Stand back, everybody. He's going full Barbara Stanwyck.

TOM

Sorry, I was a theatre major. *(beat)* I don't remember everything about that night in the restaurant, but I'll never forget how sexy Jaquan's business card smelled.

JAQUAN

I used to drown myself in Tom Ford cologne back then. Everything I touched smelled like it.

TOM

I never imagined we would meet and fall in love.

MOLLY

Wait! You were wearing Tom Ford while helping a stranger named Tom get home to his estranged family. He enters a drug rehab. He becomes clean and sober, and then the two of you meet and fall in love on a Harlem rooftop in the middle of August. That's a Hallmark movie. We would watch it over and over again. Wouldn't we watch that, Peter?

PETER

If the Knicks weren't playing.

SHAMEKA

Funny, I can't remember the last drug addicted, interracial, gay, romance, Hallmark movie it was that I watched.

JAQUAN

Don't worry, Shameka. Hallmark won't be doing the Tom and Jaquan story. Molly, you make it sound more romantic than it was. It was two people meeting and things just happened.

TOM

Things didn't just happen. It was romantic. A black knight in shining armor coming to my rescue.

JAQUAN

Things just happened. *(beat)* My three girlfriends still want to fight him.

TOM

It's been four years. They've warmed up to me.

JAQUAN

No, they haven't.

*(The egg timer DINGS.)*

PETER

We should ignore that. Sorry, Tom. Molly and I had no idea you were recovering.

*(TOM walks to the bar and resets the alarm for the next drink choice.)*

TOM

Don't. I didn't share my story to change the mood of the party. Addiction is my problem. Mummy and daddy never stopped drinking around me, so why should you.

SHAMEKA

Let's go with a Filthy Sopping-Wet Martini.

PETER

*(to TOM)*

Are you sure?

TOM

It's not a problem.

*(PETER goes to the bar and mixes the next round.)*

JAQUAN

Tom has since learned that Amy Winehouse is not the Queen of Soul.

TOM

But she is the closest thing white people will ever come to having an Aretha Franklin.

PETER

Teena Marie is the closest thing white people have ever come to having an Aretha Franklin.

*(SHAMEKA is surprised and impressed by Peter's statement.)*

SHAMEKA

Teena Marie? Having a black maid has gotten you and Molly all the way together.

PETER

Claire is a Tony Bennett fan.

JAQUAN

*(to PETER)*

What you know about Teena Marie?

PETER

My grandfather was a concert promoter.

SHAMEKA

I'm not buying it. This is straight out of an Octavia Butler novel. A white family renovates a Harlem brownstone. They move in with their adopted black son, and the black spirits of the house slowly take possession of their bodies.

TOM

VERY SLOWLY.

*(PETER leaves the bar and brings a Filthy Sopping Wet martini to SHAMEKA and MOLLY.)*

PETER

Tom, Dolly Parton is probably closer to being the queen of soul than Amy Winehouse ever was.

JAQUAN

Don't come for Peter unless she sends for you.

PETER

*(confused)*

She?

JAQUAN

Sorry, it's something we do.

SHAMEKA

I have indisputable evidence.

*(SHAMEKA puts down her martini and goes to the bookshelf. She pulls out several Walter Mosley novels.)*

*She tosses them down onto the coffee table like trump cards in a game of Spades. She's in a full on performance of the retelling of the possession of the Castle family.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

The handsome Dr. Castle getting hooked on Walter Mosley books; A Red Death, White Butterfly, Black Betty.

*(SHAMEKA rushes over to the Ernie Barnes painting. Her hands present the painting as if it's the next prize on the Price is Right.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

Your newly acquired love for black art. The Graduate by Ernie Barnes. And the pièce de résistance. Molly standing up in the middle of the Frederick Douglass giving her rendition of Black Women Talking.

*(SHAMEKA begins to recite the poem.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

I love to hear black women talking.

*(MOLLY leaps in and takes over the poem. She launches into a Def Poetry Jam performance.)*

MOLLY

Black women squawking.

I was raised around black women talking

Black women squawking.

Not black women created by Andy Cohen for profit and fame.

Black women created from color lines and being told to stay behind the times.

Black women created from pain and strain and blood stains from Bull Connor's reign.

I love to hear black women talking.

Black women squawking.

MOLLY (cont'd)

I got my first ass whupping around black women talking.

Black women squawking.

Not black women created by a viral sensation viewed by a Youtube nation.

Black women created from assassination and still not losing love for a nation.

Myrlie Evers, Coretta Scott King, four mothers of four little girls.

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze.

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

*(MOLLY courtesies.)*

TOM

*(utter bewilderment)*

Did she just.....

SHAMEKA

She sure did.

TOM

She gentrified Maya Angelou.

*(SHAMEKA picks up her martini and takes gulp.)*

SHAMEKA

Yup.

*(JAQUAN, not so smoothly, diverts the conversation back to PETER'S grandfather.)*

JAQUAN

Sooooo, what kind of concerts did your grandfather promote, Peter?

PETER

An oldies R&B circuit. Mavis Staples used to babysit me backstage.

JAQUAN

The Staple Singers. You're an R&B head.

PETER

Not since I was eight.

MOLLY

Peter's mother says he was kidnapped. From the time he was four he spent the summers traveling with his grandfather on concert tours.

PETER

Somewhere in the attic are autographs and 45s of some great R&B singers; The Spinners, Rose Royce, The O'Jays, Betty Wright.

JAQUAN

You know something about Betty Wright?

PETER

Not really. They loved my grandfather and tolerated his spoiled grandson. He died a couple of months before I turned eight.

JAQUAN

That's all my mother ever played in our house. Soul music was never done any better than by the artists you spent your summers with. Why didn't it grab a hold and keep you?

PETER

I think it reminded me too much of him. Then I discovered girls. I wasn't going to get to first base talking about Wilson Pickett.

JAQUAN

Wilson Pickett would have gotten you to third base.

MOLLY

We have an old VHS tape of Mavis Staples singing at the funeral. It would bring you to tears.

PETER

She was his favorite. Alexa, play I'll Take You There.

ALEXA (v.o.)

Playing I'll Take You There by the Staple Singers.

*(The song, I'll Take You There fills the room. PETER drops his head and goes into a deep memory.)*

*Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids*

*SHAMEKA and JAQUAN slowly dance towards each other and become one. MOLLY directs an "I guess that just leaves us" gesture towards TOM. MOLLY and TOM begin the most out of rhythm dance.)*

*(The front door opens and RITA DUPREE enters. She doesn't wear a coat and hasn't dressed or primped for the cocktail party. Her every day street wear, hair and lack of makeup suggests that her coming was a last minute decision. RITA holds a plastic grocery bag. Inside is Elijah's teddy bear. Everyone is lost in the music. RITA goes unnoticed for a while.)*

*(PETER notices RITA.)*

PETER

Alexa, stop.

*(The music stops.)*

*(Each of the dancers stop as they notice the missing music. They each follow PETER'S gaze and see RITA standing on the inside landing. )*

*(RITA sings a mournful verse of I'll Take You There.)*

RITA

Ain't nobody cryin'  
Ain't nobody worried  
Ain't no smilin' faces  
Lyn' to the races  
Somebody, help me now - I'll take you there  
Help me, y'all - I'll take you there

*(JAQUAN rushes over to RITA. She allows herself to go limp and release the weight she's been carrying. JAQUAN holds up her weight in his arms.)*

JAQUAN

Sister Dupree, what are you doing here? Are you okay? Where's your coat? It's freezing out.

*(RITA stands on her own and gathers herself.)*

RITA

I can't get no more cold. Molly said you would be here. I wanted to come and thank you. I've seen you marching and protesting on the news. Making sure they don't forget Elijah. I'm sorry for not reaching back out to you. Tonight felt different. It felt like I should come.

*(MOLLY and PETER make their way over to RITA and JAQUAN. RITA appears even more fragile to MOLLY than during her earlier visit. PETER tries to catch up quickly to the new situation. SHAMEKA and TOM take it all in from the main room.)*

MOLLY

*(to RITA)* It's good to see you again. Rita and I had a nice talk other day, Jaquan. I invited her to join us. I didn't say anything because I wasn't sure she would make it, but I'm so glad she did.

PETER

Mrs. Dupree, welcome to our home. I'm Molly's husband. We're both sorry for your loss.

RITA

Thank you, and it's just Rita. I'm not married.

PETER

Can I fix something to warm you up? I'm playing bartender tonight. How about a hot chocolate? Did you forget your coat?

RITA

No, I didn't forget it. I'm only a few blocks over. Hot chocolate sounds nice, but my grandmother swore that Gin calmed her nerves. My nerves are worse off than my body is cold.

PETER

Your grandmother would have always been welcomed at one of our cocktail parties. Molly, you should bring Rita inside and introduce her to our other guests. I'll get started on that drink.

RITA

Thank you.

*(PETER goes to the bar and prepares RITA'S drink.)*

MOLLY

Come inside, Rita.



*(MOLLY leads RITA into the main room. JAQUAN stays back. He's blindsided by Molly's interference.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

Shameka and Tom, I want you to meet Rita Dupree.

SHAMEKA

I'm sorry about your son. My nieces and nephews play in that same park. We need to ask for better.

TOM

Miss Dupree, I never met your son, but I know Elijah was going to be an amazing man. Destined to do extraordinary things. The system has failed us every time we've lost a brother, sister, mother or father at the hands of police violence, but not this time. We will stay in the streets until we get justice for your son. Until we get justice for Elijah. Three seconds. Three seconds for them to assess the situation and determine that Elijah was a threat. A threat to two trained police officers with guns, tasers and billy clubs. Those police were never in fear for their lives. The only thing I hope is that Elijah didn't have time to be in fear for his.

*(JAQUAN walks over to the main room.)*

JAQUAN

Tom, this isn't the place. Molly, I thought tonight was just about new friends getting together. I shouldn't be meeting Elijah's mother at a cocktail party. I wish I had known you were out here knocking on doors and representing yourself as a part of Black Lives Matter. I would have told you not to. You've been to half a rally.

MOLLY

That's not what I did. I went to Rita's house as a mother. I knocked on her door as a mother. I went inside and sat with her as a mother of a black boy wanting to comfort another mother of a black boy. I don't need to be a part of a movement for that, and I don't need to ask your permission.

*(PETER leaves the bar with Rita's drink in his hand. He attempts to lighten the mood.)*

PETER

My wife sees something that needs to be done and goes about the business of doing it. You should see the number of rebate checks she just showed me.

*(JAQUAN is unmoved by Peter's words.)*

*(PETER hands RITA her drink. PETER continues, but with a more stern tone in defense of his wife's actions.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Elijah's mother is in front of you. Something that wasn't happening. Molly had the easy part. Your job is a lot more difficult. It shouldn't matter where you're meeting her. Somebody smarter than me told me that earlier tonight. Let me get you another Coke.

JAQUAN

You can keep your Coke and your unsolicited advice. I don't need them.

PETER

That might be the problem.

JAQUAN

What's that mean?

PETER

Maybe if you would let other people--

*(MOLLY interrupts PETER to head off the confrontation.)*

MOLLY

*(to JAQUAN)*

I only thought to invite Rita tonight because I knew you had something to give her that I probably don't have.

JAQUAN

You're right. You don't. You don't have a clue, so stop trying to--

RITA

Please don't. I didn't know my coming would start anything.

JAQUAN

*(to RITA)*

No, it's not. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you.

RITA

Molly's visit was the best part of my week. What you've been doing is the only good thing I got. I came tonight because I needed to. I wanted to say thank you.

JAQUAN

You don't need to thank me. I wish we could do more.

*(RITA holds out the plastic grocery bag for MOLLY to take.)*

RITA

I brought this for Jason.

*(MOLLY takes the bag and pulls out a well-worn teddy bear.)*

RITA (cont'd)

Even at twelve it found its way into Elijah's bed. He would want your son to have it.

MOLLY

I don't know what to say. Thank you.

SHAMEKA

Ain't this some bullshit. The woman we should be comforting is comforting us. If the gin in my martini wasn't so damn calming, I'd be cussing everybody out. *(to RITA)* You know the Frederick Douglass?

RITA

That bookstore has been around longer than me.

SHAMEKA

I'm always there. Stop by anytime you'd like. I keep a pot of coffee on in the back room. It's a lot better than that expensive ass Starbucks shit they brought up to Harlem. When did everybody give up on drinking Maxwell House?

RITA

I might do that.

SHAMEKA

You better. I'll pick out some books for you. Who do you like to read?

RITA

Elijah was the reader in the family. His nose stayed inside a book. He said they took him places.

*(PETER takes the teddy bear and plastic bag from MOLLY.)*

PETER

It's been a while since we've checked on Jason.

*(PETER walks behind the bar and disposes of the plastic bag and then heads towards the left archway.)*

PETER (cont'd)

*(to RITA)* He's going to love this. Thank you. *(to MOLLY)* Are you going to be okay?

MOLLY

Everything is fine. Go.

*(PETER exits.)*

*(TOM walks over and takes JAQUAN'S hand and leads him to the bar. JAQUAN doesn't protest the action. TOM pours JAQUAN a Coke in hopes of being supportive.)*

*(RITA takes in the room.)*

RITA

We used to walk by your house every day. It's on the way to Elijah's school. We watched it go from looking liking nothing to being the prettiest house on the block.

MOLLY

Thank you. We put a lot into it. We hope Harlem will be our home for a long time.

RITA

I never thought I'd be inside. Elijah wouldn't believe me if I could tell him. Now I know what they looked like before landlords got to chopping them all up. Squeezing in as many black folks as possible. I never thought about it until now, but my whole family lives together. We're just separated by walls. My mom's apartment is on the other side of that archway. My sister's is to the right. My apartment is most of this room. Elijah's bedroom is right where I'm standing. They got two more families squeezed up in here somehow. We're all living on top of each other in a house made for one. They ain't pretty all chopped up.

*(A cell phone RINGS.)*

MOLLY

Sorry, everyone. I forgot to say we make it a rule to have our guests turn off their phones until the end of the night. *(to RITA)* Unless its yours. I can understand you needing it.

RITA

I'm behind on my bill.

SHEMEKA

My ringer is off.

TOM

Nope.

*(JAQUAN doesn't offer a response.)*

*(The ringing stops.)*

*(PETER enters. He goes to MOLLY and wraps her up in his arms.)*

PETER

We took a quick trip to the potty, perfect aim, and then Jason cuddled right up to the teddy bear. *(to RITA)* We'll make sure he knows how special it is.

RITA

That makes me happy.

MOLLY

*(to PETER)*

Did you leave your phone on?

PETER

I thought it was on vibrate. Sorry.

*(Cell phone RINGS.)*

MOLLY

Peter.

*(PETER heads for the bar to grab his phone.)*

PETER

Sorry.

*(PETER retrieves the phone from a shelf below the bar.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Hello.....

MOLLY

Sorry not to follow our own rules.

PETER

Just a minute. She's right here.

*(PETER holds out the phone towards MOLLY.)*

PETER (cont'd)

It's for you. It's Sarah from your legal department.

MOLLY

On your phone?

PETER

Yours is off. She sounds excited.

*(MOLLY takes the phone.)*

MOLLY

I promise only to be a minute.

JAQUAN

Sorry not to follow your own rules.

*(MOLLY feels the jab of Jaquan's remark and pleads to PETER.)*

MOLLY

Try to make everyone happy.

*(MOLLY moves slightly away from the group to hold her phone conversation.)*

PETER

Whose drink can I freshen up?

*(SHAMEKA holds out her glass. PETER scoops it up and heads for the bar.)*

*(An awkward moment forms between the guests trying not to focus on Molly's phone conversation and finding something to occupy their attention in the room.)*

MOLLY

Hi, Sarah. I can't talk long. We have guests..... When did that happen..... That's great news..... Congratulations to everybody..... No, it wasn't my effort alone. I can't take all the credit.... You're too sweet. Listen, I'll call you in the morning and we can talk more about it..... Thanks for the wonderful news.

*Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids*

*(MOLLY hangs up the phone. She runs behind the bar to PETER and expresses her joy.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

We did it. We were granted the injunction. We made it happen.

*(PETER stops preparing the drink and focuses on MOLLY. Not wanting to give her more evidence of him not listening. He feigns knowledge of the source of her excitement.)*

PETER

Good. An injunction is just what we were hoping for to save the indigenous Rattlesnakes of the Swiss Alps.

MOLLY

There are no rattlesnakes in the Swiss Alps.

PETER

Why? Were we too late to save them?

*(MOLLY pushes PETER away from her.)*

MOLLY

You have no idea what I'm talking about.

*(PETER guesses confidently.)*

PETER

Seals.

MOLLY

The western prairie fringed orchid is what we got the injunction for.

PETER

That was next.

MOLLY

We are never having sex again.

RITA

What's a western prairie fringed orchid?

MOLLY

Rita, I am sorry.

*(MOLLY goes to RITA.)*

MOLLY (cont'd)

This can wait. I shouldn't celebrate in front of you. Are you sure we can't get you some hot chocolate or tea? You still look cold. Tom, do you need anything? Jaquan? Peter, help me.

RITA

Good things are still allowed to happen. It's okay. Tell us.

MOLLY

It's a flower.

RITA

No, I understood it's a flower. Why does it have you so happy?

MOLLY

The western prairie fringed orchid is one of the most beautiful fragrant flowers that you could ever be around. It grows in the prairies of the Midwest. Prairies that have all but disappeared. The flower is threatened, but was given protected status in 1989.

TOM

So what's the injunction for?

MOLLY

This past summer a real estate developer was tearing down a hundred year old farmhouse and planning on developing the entire acreage. Growing behind the farmhouse was a western prairie fringed orchid.

TOM

One?

MOLLY

Yes, one.

SHAMEKA

So, the injunction stops them from plowing everything?



MOLLY

Thankfully. It never should have gone to court. The flower is already protected, but the real estate developer's argument was that it's only one plant.

PETER

I can see their point. Dig it up and move it.

MOLLY

No, that land has returned to what nature meant it to be. There's no telling how many more western prairie fringed orchids are about to burst out of the ground. The orchids were there first. It's their land. It's their home.

TOM

Is that it? You won and the real estate company lost?

MOLLY

The injunction only takes us up until the end of Spring.

PETER

There must be ten feet of snow in the Midwest right now. That flower must be dead.

MOLLY

It's a perennial. If we leave it alone it will come back.

TOM

It's not even there anymore? You got a court to protect dirt.

MOLLY

We got a court to do what was right. The court is protecting the possibility of it coming back.

TOM

If one flower gets that much protection from a court, then black boys need to be put on the endangered species list.

*(RITA slowly fades away from the group but continues taking in every word and contemplating all sides.)*

SHAMEKA

What did you say?

TOM

Black boys need to be put on the endangered species list.

SHAMEKA

I didn't think you were going to do any worse than your mammy impression, but you just scored the whitest winningest touchdown of the night.

TOM

You can't see that? The court is protecting the possibility of a flower coming back. What about protecting the possibility of black boys?

JAQUAN

Black boys aren't a different species than the cops killing them. They don't need to be put on an endangered species list.

TOM

If that's what it takes for us to protect them.

SHAMEKA

Let's put your ass on the endangered species list.

TOM

Cops aren't shooting at me or twelve-year-old little white boys who look like me. They take us safely into custody, AK-47s, knives, bombs, zip ties and all. Then talk about us coming from broken homes, or being prescribed the wrong antidepressant. Black boys need to be added to the endangered species list.

SHAMEKA

Go to hell.

MOLLY

Tom might have a point.

SHAMEKA

And you should follow him.

PETER

Hey!

SHAMEKA

Sorry. It seems the gin in this martini has suddenly stopped being so damn calming.

MOLLY

The endangered species list brings awareness to what needs to be saved, and it works. The unlawful killings of Asian elephants, snow leopards, Bengal tigers and countless other species is on the decline or at least being punished when it happens.

TOM

I don't know anyone being punished for shooting black boys. Black boys need to be listed as an endangered species. How do we do that?

JAQUAN

We don't, so stop saying it. It shouldn't take being called an endangered species for cops to stop killing black boys. For them to not kill me. For them not to have killed Elijah.

PETER

Black Lives Matter. Isn't that to remind us that lives of black people have value? That's what the endangered species list does. It reminds us that those lives matter and we can't kill them to the point of extinction. Sometimes I do listen, Molly.

SHAMEKA

Animals. It protects animals.

JAQUAN

All it should take to protect a black boy is to see his humanity, even in his worst moments. The same humanity they still saw in the eyes of a white boy who had just killed nine people he had prayed with. You're telling me they can only imagine a black boy's humanity if he's listed next to an animal?

*(JAQUAN launches into an imitation of a Western Lowland Gorilla. JAQUAN'S imitation is beat for beat the same as the imitation Peter performed earlier. JAQUAN apes his way to MOLLY and begins grooming her. He grabs MOLLY up in his arms. MOLLY is rigid from fear and confusion at JAQUAN'S actions. She breaks free of his hold. JAQUAN ends his imitation.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

I'm not an animal.

MOLLY

Us elevating ourselves above nature is just as wrong as us elevating ourselves above each other. It's a license to disrespect and kill anything you think is less than you. That's what's happening to black boys. That's what's happening to polar bears and prairie fringed orchids. I've seen an Elephant calf nudge its dead mother for over an hour after she was killed by poachers. The adults in the herd would pull the calf away, but it would run back to nudge its dead mother each time. That's not instinct. That's grief. Humans don't have a license on it.

PETER

Can we stop talking?

MOLLY

No, we can't. We don't have that privilege anymore. I'm trying to save our son.

SHAMEKA

It's not by putting him on an endangered species list. It's getting people to see him and not what they think they see. What do you see when you walk into the bookstore? When you see me? Every time you come into the Frederick Douglass you ask if my boss is here. Is this a good time for us to talk? You got all the imagination in the world for grieving elephants, but you can't imagine somebody who looks like me owning a bookstore. Its my bookstore, and it never crossed your mind that it could be. You don't see us. You see what you've been conditioned to see. Along with fresh fruits and vegetables your white bias has moved in too.

PETER

That's not fair.

MOLLY

Or true. Not knowing it was your bookstore doesn't make me the person you're describing. It makes me a person who didn't know it was your bookstore.

SHAMEKA

And the locusts are swooping in to eat that up too. Their greedy little mouths looking to gobble up the Frederick Douglass and put in a Pinkberry. "The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank." Marching through our families locking away our men. Marching through our playgrounds, killing our boys. Marching through our neighborhoods moving us out of our homes. Leaving me with nothing. Leaving me to fight on my own.

*(SHAMEKA stares at MOLLY and repeats MOLLY'S words back to her.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

"The orchids were there first. It's their land. It's their home." Every black person in Harlem understands that orchid better than you ever will.

PETER

I think what my wife and Tom are trying to say--

JAQUAN

I'm done. I'm done listening to non-people of color debate about putting black people on an endangered species list.

PETER

White people.

JAQUAN

Yes, white people. Stop trying to decide what's best for black people when you don't even know black people.

PETER

I live in Harlem around a lot of black people.

JAQUAN

You live in a house in Harlem around a lot of black people. I've never seen you at the barber shop. When was the last time you were at the basketball court? You don't live in Harlem. You stay in Harlem.

PETER

I was in a Harlem Starbucks this morning with my three-year-old son. Not a single person looked like me, including my son.

JAQUAN

Black people have been living in Harlem for almost a hundred years. Did it take a Starbucks for you to get here? You didn't move to Harlem to be our neighbor and invite us to cocktail parties. You moved to Harlem to push us out, and that's when you'll start living in Harlem.

RITA

I would take it, Jaquan. I would. If putting Elijah on an endangered species list would have made those police officers put away their guns. If that's the way to prove my son's life has value, then put him on a list next to an animal. They wouldn't have killed Elijah if he was a polar bear or one of those black bears they have out in California. I've seen it on the news. Bears come down swimming in their pools. The people living in the houses get scared and call 911. The police show up, but they don't ever kill the bear. You would think that's the time they would be in fear for their life. The police call for them animal wildlife people to come shoot it with a dart. The bear falls asleep and they carry it back up into the woods. If Elijah was protected like one of them bears, they would have carried him back home to me. They killed my son while he was playing inside a park. A park for children to play in. That's what Elijah was doing. Ain't twelve years old still being a child? Even if it's a black child. Elijah wasn't playing anything bad. He wasn't playing anything wrong. That park was a place for him to be whatever it is he wanted to be. Sometimes he would jump from the top of the slide like he had a parachute. What that boy know about parachutes? I ain't never met a boy who didn't want a toy gun. Asking for one right before Christmas, or for his birthday, or just asking to be asking for something. Picking up a stick and pretending like he had one.

RITA (cont'd)

Black boys have imaginations. Black boys pretend. What did those police officers see when they saw my son? Because I only ever saw a twelve-year-old little boy, who never knew how to put his cereal bowl in the sink. Why didn't they see that? Why didn't they see a twelve-year-old boy playing inside a park? Why didn't they see what was on his chest? He drew the pattern and I cut it out from one of my old dresses. It was big and yellow. Sheriff was spelled out in black magic marker on it. Didn't them police officers see that? Didn't they see Elijah was pretending to be like them? *(beat)* I still got one more son for them to take. Put him on a list.

*(The lights click off.)*

PETER

Alexa, lights.

*(The lights click on.)*

PETER (cont'd)

They turn off we stand still too long.

RITA

It still feels dark. I'm sorry. This is all still new to me. Would you mind if I used your bathroom?

MOLLY

Of course, it's through the left archway. Would you like me to come with you?

RITA

No, I just need a few minutes alone. I'll be alright.

*(RITA exits.)*

JAQUAN

Talk to me when a Prairie Fringed Orchid expresses that kind of pain.

TOM

She just said it. She would take it. Rita would put her son on an endangered species list to save him.

JAQUAN

Yeah. A black woman who just lost her son said it, not a rich white boy from Fifth Avenue.

TOM

The white boy isn't supposed to have a voice. The white boy can't have a thought in all this.

JAQUAN

We should call it a night. Peter, would you mind getting us our coats?

TOM

No.

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Let's save this for later.

TOM

No, because there's never a later with you. Whatever you're feeling right now is just going to be covered up later by that thing you do.

JAQUAN

That's probably for the best because you don't want what I'm feeling.

TOM

Try me, because, lately, I don't know what you're feeling. How many times did you pull away from me tonight? How many times did you have me biting my tongue listening to Shameka talk shit about me being with a black man, or you being with a white one, or you just being with a man? I'm still not sure which one she's mad about?

SHAMEKA

You, being with a black one.

TOM

So you're not a homophobe. You're just a racist.

SHAMEKA

No. I'm a black woman, raised in Harlem, who can pick up on things.

*(SHAMEKA goes to the bookshelf and pulls out the book Mapplethorpe. She drops the book like it's the highest trump card in the deck.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

*(to TOM)*

The collected photos of Robert Mapplethorpe. I'm sure you're familiar with his Man in Polyester Suit. Maybe mummy and daddy have it hung next to the Jackson Pollock.  
*(beat)* No pun intended.

*(JAQUAN doesn't want any part of this discussion.)*

JAQUAN

Peter, would you please just get us our coats? Rita can catch a ride with us. We'll drop her off on our way.

TOM

*(to Jaquan)*

That's your response. Peter, would you please get us our coats? We'll drop Rita off on our way. Do you know what she's trying to say?

JAQUAN

Yes, that you fetishize me and my big black--

*(TOM rushes JAQUAN and gets right up in his face.)*

TOM

Shut up!

JAQUAN

Cock.

*(JAQUAN steps around TOM unfazed and unbothered.)*

TOM

When did you stop having my back? You're going to let her imply that my feelings for you are some white man's fetish? How long have you felt like that?

JAQUAN

I don't feel like that, but you asked me if I knew what she was trying say. I knew what she was trying to say. I've met a lot of Robert Mapplethorps. I've probably even dated a few on my way to trying to find myself. Do I think you're one? No. You're something totally different. But after tonight, you should keep Black Lives Matter out your mouth.

TOM

What? You don't get to tell me that. I've been with you since the first Black Lives Matter hashtag.



TOM (cont'd)

I spent ten minutes arguing with our Uber driver over his dumb ass civil rights comments. You didn't even speak up. You had nothing to say. I've been in this room challenging every dumb thought out of Peter's mouth. You smile and make nice. No wonder they would scream white boy at you when you came back to Harlem from your private school in Connecticut. Did you pick up on that, Shameka? Did you pick up that he used to spend half of his day hiding inside your daddy's bookstore. *(beat)* I get tired of speaking up before you finally find a reason to. I get tired of watching myself fight your fight harder than you. I get tired of being more black than you.

JAQUAN

You get tired of being more black than me? Spending half the night trying to make Molly and Peter feel bad about white privilege doesn't make you more black. Arguing with our Uber driver over the Civil Rights Movement doesn't make you more black. Knowing who Hattie McDaniel are Ethel Waters are doesn't make you more black. Being more black than me would have had you knowing we were being killed before you tweeted your first Black Lives Matter hashtag. Being more black than me would have had your drug addicted ass pulling eight to ten, instead of working through your feelings behind some Alice in Wonderland shrubs. Being more black than me would never give you the freedom to just walk through the front door of some white people's house that you've never met before. And me going to that fucking private school in Connecticut never stopped the cops from throwing me up against the wall along with all the other niggas in Harlem. They weren't calling me white boy then. But you get tired of being more black than me? I get tired of you trying to grab a hold of something you'll never understand. I get tired of you walking in footprints that don't belong to you. You've gone from shooting up crystal meth into your arms to shooting up my blackness into it. Black Lives Matter is not a drug for you to get high off of. You know all the talking points. You know all the stats, but you don't know shit about being black. You get tired of being more black than me? I get tired of waking up next to the wrong person.

*(The egg timer DINGS.)*

*(TOM walks over to the bar and picks up the drink menu card.)*

MOLLY

Please don't do that.

*(TOM goes about preparing the final drink, a classic martini.)*

PETER

Tom, please.

JAQUAN

It's his six month bluff. Tell them, Tom. It's your way of tying our relationship to your sobriety. Making sure I won't ever leave you.

MOLLY

Jaquan, stop.

*(TOM continues preparing the drink as JAQUAN starts revealing secrets.)*

JAQUAN

Look how easy that was, Tom. You got Molly on your side. Why don't you go for Peter next? This is one of his favorite games. Drug addicts are great at it. Tell them how I know that, Tom. Tell them why I cooked dinner for you on a Harlem rooftop.

PETER

This isn't funny.

*(PETER heads towards the coat closet.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Let me get your coat, Jaquan. You can call an Uber. Tom can stay here for awhile, until you both calm down.

JAQUAN

DING - DING - DING! You got Peter.

*(PETER stops advancing towards the closet at the mention of his name and turns around.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

I know what you're thinking, Tom. Should I go for Shameka? That's a big fish to land. She's been talking shit about you all night, but can you get some sympathy out of her?

MOLLY

Stop this.

JAQUAN

You're already out of the game, Molly. You chose the drug addict. Never choose the drug addict. They will drown you under water so they can stay on top of the surface.

*(TOM eyes JAQUAN, while shaking the martini shaker.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

*(to TOM)*

Tell them how I know about these things. Tell them what you learned that night.

*(JAQUAN goes to the bar and snatches the martini shaker out of TOM'S hands.)*

TOM

Give it back.

*(JAQUAN backs away from the bar with the martini shaker.)*

JAQUAN

Tell them. Tell them what happened on that Harlem rooftop.

*(TOM stares at JAQUAN.)*

SHAMEKA

Jaquan--

JAQUAN

Don't you dare disappoint me, Shameka. Don't do it. Come on, Tom. Tell them what happened, and I'll give you the martini shaker back. The final drink of the night. A Classic Martini, right Peter?

PETER

Can't you see what you're doing to him? It's mean spirited. Stop.

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Damn, you're good! Tell them!

TOM

You served me spaghetti and red sauce.

JAQUAN

Why?

TOM

You told me it was your mother's favorite. You would make it special for her every time she got out of rehab. The first time you made it you were ten, then twelve, fourteen, sixteen. You said she was on a two year cycle of getting clean and then relapsing.

TOM (cont'd)

That's when you gave up your scholarship to that private school in Connecticut. Seventeen - eighteen, she didn't relapse. She said she owed it all to you.

JAQUAN

What happened my senior year?

TOM

Scholarships to every college you wanted. But your mother said you couldn't leave her. You were the only thing keeping her clean.

JAQUAN

What did I do?

TOM

You left her.

JAQUAN

She overdosed my second week on campus.

TOM

You cried when you told me that. I kissed you, and kissed you, and kissed you. One thing led to another--

JAQUAN

Things just happened. Only one of us fell in love that night, and you knew that. Never tell a drug addict your secrets on a Harlem rooftop in the middle of August. They will use them as chains. I can't keep drowning so you can stay on top of the surface. I don't love you. I just didn't want you dying because I left.

*(JAQUAN places the martini shaker back on the bar.)*

JAQUAN (cont'd)

That belongs to you. Do what you need to do.

*(TOM stares at the martini shaker. Touches it. Contemplates. He finally walks away from the bar without it.)*

*(The lights click off.)*

PETER

*(beyond annoyed.)*

Alexa, lights.

*(The lights click on.)*

PETER (cont'd)

It's been a long night. I think I should get everyone their coats. We'll make sure Rita gets home okay. Don't worry.

MOLLY

No.

PETER

What do you mean, no? Let me get their coats. The night is over.

MOLLY

No. I don't want us to end this way.

PETER

What? What, Molly? Do you want to try and save the night? Try and save your friendships? Do you want to work on Tom and Jaquan's relationship? Stop trying to save everything, everything but us. Polar bears, black boys and prairie fringed orchids aren't the only things threatened with disappearing. You putting every obstacle in the way of us having a baby is going to have us disappearing. If you want to save something, save me. Save us. Raising Jason and loving the hell out of him doesn't leave anything of me behind. I know it sounds shitty, but I want something left of me on this planet that you're working so damn hard to save. I'm getting everybody their coats. Don't say no again.

*(PETER enters the closet. He exits with a bundle of three coats. He works to free Shameka's coat first and a gun drops from the pocket of one of them. The gun fires twice as it hits the floor. Everyone reacts.)*

PETER (cont'd)

What the fuck?

*(PETER drops the bundle of coats and picks up the hot gun.)*

PETER (cont'd)

Is everyone okay. Anybody hurt?

MOLLY

That's a gun. *(to JAQUAN)* You brought a gun into our house? Why would you do that? Why would you put my son's life in danger? Jason plays inside that closet sometimes when we have guests. He likes to hide in between the coats. That gun would have gone off.

JAQUAN

It doesn't belong to me.

*(PETER walks over to the bar and places the gun on top of it.)*

PETER

They never belong to you. Get the hell out of my house.

JAQUAN

You were holding three coats. The gun doesn't belong to me.

*(PETER looks to SHAMEKA.)*

SHAMEKA

Guns scare the shit out of me.

PETER

I don't care whose gun it is. Just get it and you out of my house. Everybody get out of my house. *(pointing a finger at MOLLY)* Worst guest list ever.

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Why do you have a gun?

*(TOM doesn't answer.)*

*(PETER marches to the front door and opens it.)*

PETER

Get out.

JAQUAN

*(to TOM)*

Why do you have fucking gun?

TOM

If a cop ever killed you, I was going to kill a cop.

PETER

Get out.

*(RITA frantically runs into the room.)*

RITA

Your baby is choking. I tried to get it out but I couldn't.

MOLLY

What?

*(MOLLY takes off running and exits through the left archway.)*

PETER

Jason.

*(PETER slams the door and takes off running through the left archway.)*

*(RITA, JAQUAN, SHAMEKA and TOM rush through the left archway behind PETER.)*

*(All of the activity is heard through the baby monitor.)*

MOLLY (O.S.)

He can't breathe, Peter.

RITA (O.S.)

He had this in his mouth. I'm sorry.

PETER (O.S.)

It's a goddamn eyeball. Give him to me, Molly.

SHAMEKA (O.S.)

He must be choking on the other one.

MOLLY (O.S.)

He can't breathe.

PETER (O.S.)

Cough, Jason. Cough for daddy.

SHAMEKA (O.S.)

Should I call 911?

No.  
PETER (O.S.)

He can't breathe.  
MOLLY (O.S.)

Get Molly out of here.  
PETER (O.S.)

I'm not leaving.  
MOLLY (O.S.)

*(The swirling blue lights of a police car fill the inside of the brownstone.)*

What can I do?  
JAQUAN (O.S.)

I'm going to hit him on the back and then you check around in his mouth.  
PETER (O.S.)

He's turning blue.  
MOLLY (O.S.)

Is he going to be okay?  
RITA (O.S.)

*(DOORBELL RINGS)*

*(General sounds of talk over a police radio come from the other side of the front door.)*

NYPD.  
OFFICER LENNOX (O.S.)

*(The lights click off in the main room.)*

*(BLOWS STRIKING a toddler's back.)*

Anything?  
PETER (O.S.)



Nothing. JAQUAN (O.S.)

He's not breathing. MOLLY (O.S.)

*(DOORBELL RINGS followed by KNOCKS at the front door.)*

Dr. and Mrs. Castle this is Officer Lennox. Is everything okay inside? OFFICER LENNOX (O.S.)

*(BLOWS STRIKING a toddler's back.)*

Anything? PETER (O.S.)

No. JAQUAN (O.S.)

Hit him again. Hit him again. MOLLY (O.S.)

Come on, Jason. PETER (O.S.)

*(HARD KNOCKS at the front door.)*

*(THREE BLOWS STRIKING a toddler's back.)*

*(JASON expels the eyeball. COUGHING and CRYING erupt from the baby monitor.)*

It's out. JAQUAN (O.S.)

Give him to me. Give him to me, Peter. MOLLY (O.S.)

*(HARD KNOCKS at the front door.)*

I'm responding to a 911 call of shots fired at your residence. Do you need medical assistance? Dr. and Mrs. Castle, can you hear me? OFFICER LENNOX (O.S.)

*(Nothing.)*

*(JAQUAN enters holding the eyeless teddy bear. The lights do not respond to his motion.)*

*(COUGHING and CRYING continues to come from the baby monitor.)*

*(SHAMEKA enters. The lights do not respond to her motion. She listens to JASON'S CRIES coming from the baby monitor.)*

SHAMEKA

Please turn that off?

*(JAQUAN walks over to the accent cabinet. He lays the teddy bear down on top of the accent cabinet and picks up the baby monitor. He clicks it off.)*

SHAMEKA (cont'd)

I've never been more scared.

*(JAQUAN turns towards SHAMEKA.)*

JAQUAN

He's going to be okay.

*(The door knob turns on the front door. OFFICER LENNOX enters with his gun drawn.)*

*(JAQUAN quickly turns towards the opening door with the baby monitor in his hands.)*

*(SHAMEKA'S attention shifts to the opening door.)*

OFFICER LENNOX

Gun!

JAQUAN

SHAMEKA

No!

No!

*(JAQUAN instinctively thrust the baby monitor out towards OFFICER LENNOX to show what he's holding.)*

OFFICER LENNOX

Don't do it!

*Polar Bears, Black Boys & Prairie Fringed Orchids*

*(OFFICER LENNOX fires his gun three times in response to JAQUAN'S action.)*

*(The lights click on.)*

*(The baby monitor falls from JAQUAN'S hands as he is hit by the three bullets. JAQUAN falls to the floor.)*

*(SHAMEKA and OFFICER LENNOX stand staring at each other for several seconds. They both exit.)*

*(Nothing.)*

ELIJAH (O.S.)

*(singing)*

I know a place  
Ain't nobody cryin'  
Ain't nobody worried  
Ain't no smilin' faces  
Lyn' to the races

*(ELIJAH stops singing and enters through the front door. He sees his teddy bear on the accent cabinet. He walks over and picks it up.)*

*(JAQUAN rises from the floor. ELIJAH turns to him.)*

ELIJAH (cont'd)

Hey, Jaquan. You ready?

JAQUAN

Elijah. Is that you? What are you doing here?

ELIJAH

I'll show you where we go.

JAQUAN

Go?

ELIJAH

When we die. I'll take you there.

*(ELIJAH runs halfway up the staircase, holding his teddy bear.)*

Don't forget Molly's flower.

ELIJAH (cont'd)

What flower?

JAQUAN

The western prairie fringed orchid. It doesn't come back in the spring. It dies too.

ELIJAH

*(JAQUAN walks behind the bar.)*

Hurry up. They're waiting for us.

ELIJAH (cont'd)

Who?

JAQUAN

All the other black boys.

ELIJAH

*(ELIJAH runs up the remaining stairs and exits.)*

*(The lights click off.)*

*(JAQUAN stoops down and picks up the potted western prairie fringed orchid. He stands up holding the flower. He climbs the stairs and exits.)*

**FADE TO BLACK**

**END OF PLAY**