

GASPING

By Will MacAdams

With contributions of the ensembles (2016-2019)

GASPING has been developed over a series of workshops, readings, conversations, and meals. Gratitude to:

Trenda Loftin (performer from 2017 -2019 & co-director/post-play workshop leader for the 2019 tour) who raised questions, held space, and brought the characters more vividly to life.

Farris Alder and Willah Waldron (performers for the 2019 tour) who made it more joyful and more truthful - and their extraordinary parents, who modeled courage, generosity, and grace (And particular thanks to Farris' mother, Marie, for reading stage directions throughout the 2019 tour).

Angela Davis Johnson, who designed the "Gaspig Whiteness" mask and the dolls for the original workshops, and whose vision, care, trust, and gifts as an artist made the play possible.

Uwizeyimana (Wize) Angelique (workshop facilitator for the 2019 tour & performer in October, 2018).

COMMUNITIES THAT HOSTED READINGS OF EARLY DRAFTS OF THE PLAY:

The community of Alternate ROOTS, an artist-activist network in the U.S. South, where the play was first read aloud in the summer of 2016 at the hollerin space, with the following cast: Hannah Pepper-Cunningham, muthi reed, and Nick Slie.

The students, faculty, and staff of the Hampshire College Theatre Program, where the play was read aloud in December of 2016 with the following cast: Cat/Milo Bezark, Tasheena Stewart, and Will MacAdams.

The Ko Festival of Performance (Amherst, MA) which hosted a one-week residency of the piece in July of 2017, supported in part by the Network of Ensemble Theaters. The cast and creative team were as follows: Trenda Loftin, Hannah Pepper-Cunningham, and Nick Slie (cast); Sofía Anastasia (assistant director, dialogue facilitator); Angela Davis Johnson (masks and doll designer/builder); Will MacAdams (director); Sabrina Hamilton (Ko Festival, Artistic Director).

The Hampshire College ENGAGE! Conference, where the play was read aloud in December of 2017, with the following cast: Cat/Milo Bezark, Trenda Loftin, Will MacAdams, Tasheena Stewart and Mary Bombardier (stage directions), with post-play conversations facilitated by Mary Bombardier and Natalie Sowell.

Shannon Turner, who hosted a reading of the play in her living room in January of 2018 in Atlanta, GA with the following cast: Eleanor Brownfield, Angela Davis Johnson, Will MacAdams, Eshe Shukura, and Shannon Turner (stage directions).

Rachel Silverman, who hosted a reading of the play in her living room in Greenfield, MA in February of 2018 in partnership with Bessie Jones, of the early childhood program Sow Well Tots. The reading was a fundraiser for Sow Well Tots and featured the following cast: Cat/Milo Bezark, Trenda Loftin, Will MacAdams and Tasheena Stewart. Andrew Cathcart provided production support and Natalie Sowell facilitated a post-play workshop, with the support of Andrew Cathcart and the cast.

The 2nd Hampshire College ENGAGE! Conference, where the play was read in October of 2018, with the following cast: Uwizeyimana (Wize) Angelique, Cat/Milo Bezark, Trenda Loftin, Will MacAdams, and Aubriana Mency (stage directions) with a post-play conversation facilitated by Trenda Loftin.

PERFORMANCE SITES FOR THE 2019 SPRING TOUR. 100% OF PROCEEDS BENEFITED BIPOC-LED ORGANIZING GROUPS:

Greenfield, MA (Rachel Silverman & Rui Santos, hosts; a fundraiser for Sow Well Tots).

Northampton, MA (Northampton Center for the Arts / Kelly Silliman, hosts; a fundraiser for the Western MA SURJ reparations campaign).

New Haven, CT (Bregamos Theater / Aaron Jafferis / Sarah Lipkin / Nancy Leonard / Hanifa Nayo Washington, hosts; a fundraiser for Students 4 Educational Justice & CT-CORE Organize Now!). Made possible with the support of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.

Putney, VT (Sandglass Theater / Eric Bass, hosts; a fundraiser for The Root Social Justice Center).

West Stockbridge, MA (The Foundry / Amy Brentano / Talya Kingston, hosts; a fundraiser for BRIDGE).

Boston, MA (JP Cohousing / Jennie Rose Halperin and Josh Tetenbaum, hosts; a fundraiser for Sisters Unchained).

New York NY (Mei Ann Teo, host; a fundraiser for First Nations Dialogues).

Additional sites for the 2019 tour, where the play was shared as a teaching & training tool: **Springfield, MA** (Springfield College Office of Multicultural Affairs, sponsor); **Northampton, MA** (Farm Hands Preschool / Alya Stoffer-Koloszyc, sponsor).

**The following individuals who offered inspiration,
provocation, and many kinds of support:**

Andrew Grant-Thomas, co-founder of embracerace.org, which supports caregivers to raise children who are brave, informed, and thoughtful about race, May Antaki, Eric Bass, Mary Bombardier, Djola Branner, Amy Brentano, Eleanor Brownfield, Carrie Brunk & Bob Martin, Taiga Christie, Monique Davis, Chrsitene DeJong, Elly Donkin, Jayeesha Dutta, Ana Lua Fontes, Diana Grisanti, Nicole Gurgel-Seefeldt, Jennie Rose Halperin, Sabrina Hamilton, Michael Hanish, Aaron Jafferis, Emily Johnson, Bessie Jones, Peter Kallok, Steph Kent, thúy lê, Rythea Lee, Nancy Leonard, Bob Leonard, Dr. Megan Lewis, Beth Mattison, Steve Moulds, Onawumi Jean Moss, Tufara Muhammad, Rebecca Mwase, Hanifa Nayo Washington, Dr. Priscilla Maria Page, Melissa Penley, Amy Putnam, muthi reed, Joanna Russo, Rui Santos & Rachel Silverman, Eshe Shukura, Ellie Siegel, Kelly Silliman, Lazuli Simone, Sophia Skiles, Natalie Sowell, Ashley Sparks, Alya Stoffer-Koloszyc, Mei Ann Teo, Josh Tetenbaum, Shannon Turner, Carla Wallace, Tim Zimmerman, and many others

GASPING is performed by a four-person ensemble:

Ensemble Member 1 (White, 8-12) plays Sky and other characters, as described below

Ensemble Member 2 (White, late 30s) plays Sky's Dad (Mark) and Gasping Whiteness

Ensemble Member 3 (African-American, 9-13) plays Maya and other characters, as described below

Ensemble Member 4 (African-American, late 30s) plays Maya's Mom (Shanda) and Adult Maya

Performances begin with a land acknowledgment (info at <https://usdac.us/nativeland>) and are followed by workshops for audience members to reflect, share stories, and organize.

PART ONE

SKY (7 years old) plants seeds in her backyard garden while her father, MARK, writes a poem on a piece of paper.

SKY
Mr. Dirt, will you tell me a story
if I eat you?

MARK
Honey, please don't eat the dirt

SKY
Hi, Papa.

MARK
Hi, sweet.

SKY
Play with me.

She growls at him. He growls back.

MARK
(to audience)
Remember the time that you woke up
at dawn, threw the back door open,
and ran into the yard?

How should I describe the light?
Bone White? Misty gray?

They play in the soil together, making growls and oohs and other sounds.

SKY
Daddy, where does dirt come from?

MARK
From ice monsters who lived a
lonnnnnng time ago. They stomped
the ground so hard it turned to
dirt.

SKY
What was the ground before?

MARK
Millions and millions of stones.

SKY
I like monsters.

SKY imitates a monster, tromping in the soil.

SKY (CONT'D)
Stomp stomp clomp clomp.

"Don't crush us!" "I'm going to
crush you!"

MARK
(to audience)
Maybe I'll tell you that I picked
you up and you felt heavier than I
expected. I guess you'll always be
the sweet little you who I lifted
over my head and introduced to your
namesake, the sky.

MARK starts to exit.

SKY
Where are you going?

MARK
To finish a poem.

SKY
Play with me!

MARK
I won't be long, Sky, I just have
to-

SKY
ONE MORE MINUTE.

MARK

SKY
Just one?

MARK
Ok. But just ONE.

SKY

MARK

SKY
I'm not a real monster, papa.

MARK and SKY run circles around the vegetable bed, making
"monster attack" sounds.

After a time, he steps out and she continues to run around the garden, as if he is still trailing her.

MARK

Maybe I'll tell you that you stepped on a roly poly and we buried it with a song. Or that we stayed in the garden until the sun came up.

And maybe - just maybe - I'll tell you that the stillness in the air reminded me of the morning you were born: your mom asleep in the hospital bed; me in the bathroom, throwing water on my face to stay awake; me, staring at the face of a scared little boy - the last time I'd look in a mirror and not see a father looking back.

SKY

(stopping her playing)
What are you looking at, daddy?

MARK

You, sunshine.

SKY

I'm not sunshine, I'm a monster.

MARK

Do you have a name, monster?

SKY

I do, but it's a secret.

He picks her up and swings her as he talks.

MARK

As tightly as I held you, you were already living in a world I didn't know. Stories and games and friends' houses and dreams - all I could see were the shiny edges. But that morning was a cocoon. You. Me. The sun.

Like the day we brought you home. You, asleep on your mother's chest. My hand on your little back.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

The impossibly delicate rise and
fall of your breath.

2.

MAYA (8 years old) sits on her bed, talking to a doll.

MAYA

Daddy was nervous when he left.
That's why he left his car keys in
the refrigerator. Mama said he
doesn't need them in
Af..Afgan..Afganis..the desert.
(to her doll)
Will you hold his keys until he
gets back? You don't need pockets!
You can tuck them under your heart.
(she tucks the keys into a
rip in the doll's chest
and then throws some of
the doll's stuffing into
the air)

MAYA (CONT'D)

Cloud guts!

SHANDA

(from off)

Maya! Time for bed!

MAYA turns off the light, and holds the doll close, lit by
her nightlight.

MAYA

(whispering)

I can hear your heartbeat.

3.

MAYA explores the backyard garden, her doll in her hands. SKY
enters, also with a doll, and invites MAYA to play. At first,
MAYA refuses but SKY persists. They play, MAYA tentatively
and SKY with abandon.

SKY

Want to eat dirt?

MAYA

No.

SKY
It tastes like ice cream.

MAYA
I don't want to!

SKY

MAYA

SKY
Have you ever held a ladybug in
your hand?

MAYA
No...Have you ever heard subway
doors closing?

SKY
No...Want to eat some dirt?

MARK
(from off)
Everything OK out there?

SKY
(to MARK)
YES!

MAYA
I'm made out of stars.

SKY
No, you're not.

MAYA
Yes, I am!

SKY
No you're NOT!

MAYA starts to exit.

SKY (CONT'D)
I'm made from blood and guts and
rocks.

MAYA
So!

SKY
What do you mean, so?!

MAYA

SKY

SKY (CONT'D)
Wanna play kingdom?

MAYA
How do you play?

SKY
I jump on the trampoline and you
sit below it and try to knock me
down.

MAYA
I want to jump!

SKY
You can't. You're not the king.

MAYA
I want to jump.

SKY
That's not how you play the game.

MAYA
I can jump if I want to.

SKY
No you can't, because YOU'RE NOT
THE KING.

MARK
(from off)
Sky!

SKY
What?

MARK
(from off)
You know what. You BOTH can jump.

SKY and MAYA take off their sandals and jump on the
trampoline.

MAYA
Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack, all
dressed in black, black, black...
I'll double jump you!

SKY
Don't! I'm too little -

MAYA
You'll jump higher!

SKY
DON'T!

She does. SKY flies higher.

SKY (CONT'D)
Do it again!

Laughter, jumping, long summer shadows. The sound of a bottle breaking.

MARK
What-happened-what-happened-are-you-
OK?-what-happened?

SKY
I don't know!

MAYA
We were just jumping!

MARK
What the - ? Did someone throw a
bottle into the backyard? The
recycling bin is RIGHT THERE. God
damn motherffffffuuuu -
(Catching himself)
OK girls, both of you go inside.
Walk carefully on the grass. Maya,
wait to go upstairs until I come
back in

They get off the trampoline and move toward the house.

MARK (CONT'D)
Honey, maybe Maya wants to see your
stuffies?

SKY
She's too old for stuffies, Dad.

MAYA
No, I'm not.

MARK
PUT YOUR SANDALS ON, SKY!

MARK's head steams. The girls head inside. MARK picks up shards of glass.

MARK (CONT'D)
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

4.

SKY's bedroom.

SKY
This is Genevieve, but I call her
Gigi. She's two. But no one knows
(except me) that she had a secret
birthday so she's actually three.

MAYA
I always wanted a little sister but
my dad said I'm too perfect so he
didn't want to risk it

SKY
Want to hold her?

MAYA
OK.

SKY
You don't carry her like that.

MAYA
Like this?

SKY
Like THIS. You want to be her
nanny?

MAYA
What's that?

SKY
Someone who loves you when your
parents are away.

MAYA

SKY
(louder)
No, not like this, like THAT.

MARK
(from off)
Sky, I can hear you yelling all the
way down here!

SKY
DADDY, SHE'S HURTING MY DOLL.

MAYA
I'm not hurting it.

SKY
If you want to be a good nanny, you
have to be kind and listen and tell
stories and -

MAYA
You can have it back.

SKY
I don't want her back. I want you
to hold her. You look just like all
the nannies in the park and they
all know how to hold babies.

MARK
(from off)
SKY!

SKY
(to audience)
My daddy is afraid. He is running
toward the door. His hair stands up
like lightning bolts.

MARK enters the bedroom.

SKY (CONT'D)
(to audience)
My daddy is made from loud noise
and love. But sometimes he holds
his forehead and sweats too much.

MARK
Maya, I'm taking you upstairs.

SKY
Why?

MARK
She can't stay here right now.

SKY
I don't understand.

MARK
I'll explain to you later.

MARK attempts to escort MAYA, but MAYA refuses to let him and she walks out on her own. MARK follows.

SKY
DADDDDDYYYYYYYYY !!!!!

5.

MAYA's bedroom. SHANDA braids MAYA's hair while MAYA braids her doll's hair. The sound of rain.

MAYA
I miss Daddy.

SHANDA
He misses you, too.

MAYA
Why'd he have to leave right when
we moved into this boring
neighborhood?

SHANDA
He just had to.

MAYA
Hmf.

Pause.

SHANDA
How was school today?

MAYA
Boring.

SHANDA
Did you play with other kids?

MAYA
No.

SHANDA
Why not?

MAYA
They talk slow. I miss my old
friends. They talk as fast as
railroad tracks.

SHANDA
I saw the little girl downstairs.

MAYA

SHANDA

She's with her dad in the garden. I hope they don't catch colds.

MAYA

SHANDA

Why don't you ask her to come up to play on Saturday?

MAYA

I don't want to.

SHANDA

Why not?

MAYA

Just don't.

SHANDA

Maya, don't you want to have friends?

6.

The garden. Simultaneous with scene in MAYA's bedroom, above.

MARK and SKY wear matching, bright red raincoats. The sound of rain.

MARK

What if we catch colds?

SKY

Doesn't matter. When I plant baby seeds, I watch them drink the first rain.

MARK

Since when?

SKY

Since always.

Long pause.

MARK

How long did mom sit here?

SKY
Almost forever.

MARK
How long is that?

SKY
SHHHHHHH! The babies are
drinking.

MARK
Honey, I want to talk about the way
you talked to Maya? When you were
playing in the house. You remember
what I'm talking about?

SKY

MARK
I know it's hard sometimes. People
can be pretty annoying - well,
hopefully not her - but you still
have to use kind words.

Can you not close your eyes?

SKY
I'm listening to the rain.

MARK
I know, but I'm talking -

SKY
I asked you before and you said no,
and now I'm busy.

MARK
But this is important.

SKY
Everything you say is important but
my things are never important.

MARK
Well, this is a big thing. It has
to do -

SKY
I WANT TO HEAR THE RAIN!!!!

MARK

SKY
It sounds better when you close
your eyes, Daddy.

He closes his eyes. She puts her head on his shoulder.

SKY (CONT'D)
(falling asleep)
You hear the babies drinking?

7.

MAYA's bedroom.

SHANDA
I'm gonna boil the spaghetti.

MAYA
Wait! I made up a story!

SHANDA
TWO minutes.

SHANDA checks her cell phone.

MAYA
Is it Daddy?

SHANDA
No, he can't call until they get to
the base. I think Sunday. OK.
Ready.

MAYA
This is a story about a mom and a
little girl. The girl in the story,
she's called Ember. Ember collected
keys. Then, one night, when her mom
was asleep, she opened her window
and took out her keys and hung them
to the stars.

SHANDA
Uh huh...

MAYA
Ember swung from star to star all
the way across the world and landed
in the desert where she saw her
daddy, asleep.

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)

She climbed down from the stars and kissed him on the forehead. Right where the wrinkle was when his face scrunched up, when he hugged us goodbye.

He didn't wake up. But he smiled, deep in his sleep. And so did Ember.

And then she swung all the way back to her bedroom, just as the sun was coming up.

SHANDA gets up, kissing MAYA on the forehead. She starts to exit.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Mama, wait, I have a question.

8.

The garden.

MARK

You asleep?

SKY doesn't wake. He lays her down gently, gets up, stretches, and starts weeding the garden, perhaps singing softly.

His eyes catch something in the soil. He pulls out a white mask covered with mirrors. He looks around, but nothing has changed: his daughter is asleep, the rain continues to fall.

The mask in MARK's hand starts to sing. From this point forward, the actor playing MARK plays two roles: MARK and GASPING WHITENESS, depicted as a MASK which is both part of his body and separate from it.

GASPING WHITENESS

(singing, to the tune of
"The Rose")

Some say whiteness, it is a razor,
that leaves your soul to bleed.
Some say whiteness, it is a hunger,
an endless aching need.
I say whiteness, it is a flower,
and you, its only seed.

(GASPING WHITENESS coughs
uncontrollably)

My name is

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

(gasps for breath)

---Whiteness

(gasps for breath)

---Whiteness.

GASPING whiteness.

(choking)

The air is thin on top of the patriarchy....and white, middle class people have so many words stuck in their throats!

Ok, to my point to my point to my point... You called????

MARK

I didn't call you.

GASPING WHITENESS

Yes, you did. I was doing the backstroke through roots and bones...and I felt THAT ITCH. The particular itch that comes when well-meaning white folks try to dig up their past and bury it at the same time.

MARK

I was just weeding the garden.

GASPING WHITENESS

Before that.

MARK

I was watching Sky.

GASPING WHITENESS

And you wondered.

MARK

I wondered?

GASPING WHITENESS

You wondered, where had your daughter ever learned this
(whispering)
racism.

MARK

GASPING WHITENESS

And, in that moment, you called deep into your white wondering.

MARK

I didn't use those words.

GASPING WHITENESS

They never do...

MARK

GASPING WHITENESS

Listen, child, I can't wait here until you think of all the questions you have...I'm gonna slip in all this blood.

MARK

What blood?

GASPING WHITENESS

On your house. In the soil. On your clothes. Everything you touch is covered in blood.

MARK

Everything?

GASPING WHITENESS

Well, not everything.

MARK

What isn't.

GASPING WHITENESS

Your daughter. She isn't

MARK

GASPING WHITENESS

But she's eating food from your garden.

MARK desperately puts the mask back into the soil. His daughter opens her eyes.

SKY

I had a nightmare.

MARK

Want to tell me about it?

SKY shakes her head "no." MARK holds her close.

9.

MAYA's bedroom.

SHANDA
No more questions, Maya.

MAYA
What's a nanny?

SHANDA
What?

MAYA
Well, when I was playing in the
garden...

SHANDA
Maya?

MAYA
Yes, mama?

SHANDA
Did the girl downstairs say
something to you?

Pause.

MAYA
Her name is Sky.

SHANDA
Did Sky say something to you?

MAYA
No.

SHANDA
Maya?

10.

The next evening. In the garden. MARK waters plants.
SHANDA enters.

MARK
A little cold, yeah?

SHANDA nods her head.

MARK (CONT'D)

I like to water at dusk - better deal with the mosquitos than the heat. You garden?

SHANDA

We had some window boxes in our old place -

MARK

Sometimes I wish that's all I had.... I work freelance so this is how I clear my mind. Or that's what I tell myself.

I assume that Maya told you about the conversation. I mean, what Sky said.

SHANDA

Yes.

MARK

She didn't learn that at home. I guess that's not the point.

SHANDA

No.

MARK

We had a nanny for a while, before I started freelance. She was from Grenada, so I guess that Maya...

SHANDA

Why don't you stop there?

MARK

Huh?

SHANDA

Just-

MARK

I'm not trying to-

SHANDA

No, you're not.

MARK

Listen, I know I am doing this wrong. I-

SHANDA
Yes, you are.

MARK
So what is the right way?

SHANDA
You expect me to tell you?

MARK
No.

SHANDA
Your daughter called my daughter a
nanny.

MARK
I know - and I immediately stopped
it - and sent her up.

SHANDA
No, you don't know. And I'm not the
one to tell you.

MARK
I don't want you to educate me. I
just want our daughters to be
friends.

SHANDA
I appreciate that, Mike.

MARK
Mark.

Awkward pause.

MARK (CONT'D)
Forgot you were on a business trip
when your husband signed the lease.
Look, all I'm saying is my daughter
is not some kind of monster.

SHANDA
No, that's exactly the problem.

MARK
Huh?

SHANDA
You're not a monster and your
daughter is not a monster. You're
just every day white people.

She starts to exit.

MARK
Shanda?

SHANDA
Yes?

MARK
I'm sorry.

SHANDA
For what?

MARK
Uhhh

SHANDA exits.

11.

MAYA's bedroom. MAYA is standing on a chair glueing glow-in-the-dark stars onto the ceiling

SHANDA enters in a rush.

SHANDA
What are you doing?

MAYA
Um..putting stars on the ceiling?

SHANDA
With what?

MAYA
Glitter....and toothpaste.

SHANDA
WHAT?

MAYA
I'll take them down in the morning.

SHANDA
You'll take them down NOW.

During the following lines, MAYA takes stars off the ceiling as SHANDA looks out the window.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

Maya, I want you to stay inside
when you come home from school.
Don't go playing in the garden.

MAYA

Why?

The sound of a door slamming, downstairs.

MAYA (CONT'D)

What was that?

SHANDA

Probably the little girl's-

MAYA

Sky.

SHANDA

Probably Sky's Dad.

MAYA

SHANDA

I talked to him about what she said
to you.

MAYA

Did you get mad?

SHANDA

I got honest.

MAYA

SHANDA

What?

MAYA

He's not going to kick us out, is
he?

SHANDA

Of course not.

MAYA

Are you sure?

SHANDA

Yes...but it doesn't matter. I
have to fight for you. Always.

MAYA
Do I have to fight?

SHANDA
Sometimes.

MAYA looks scared.

SHANDA (CONT'D)
You don't have to fight tonight,
OK?
(beat)
Come here.

MAYA gets down from the chair and nestles into SHANDA's arms.

MAYA
You smell good.

SHANDA combs her daughter's hair with her fingers.

SHANDA
Maya, are those pretzel crumbs?

MAYA
Uhhh....

SHANDA
Maya?!

MAYA
I was eating them while I was doing
my homework at least!

SHANDA
How can you sleep with crumbs in
your bed?

MAYA
I brush them onto the floor...

SHANDA
You are definitely your Dad's
child.

MAYA
He is way worse! Remember when he
would stick like five pretzels in
his mouth and try to tell a story?

SHANDA
I'm still finding pretzel crumbs
under the bed.

Pause.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

Maya?

MAYA

Yes?

SHANDA

I'm glad your Dad wasn't here when I was talking to that guy.

MAYA

You are? Why?

SHANDA

Well...you know how he always forgives people, no matter what they do?

MAYA

Like when Uncle Alan stole his car?

SHANDA

Yeah, like that.

(After a pause)

I love that part of him. It's taught me how to not be so hard all the time - don't comment on that, Maya.

But, sometimes, it's ok not to make up. Even if it's hard. Sometimes, if somebody broke something, then they have to fix it.

12.

In the garden. SKY and MARK pull up weeds as they talk.

SKY

I didn't mean to be mean to Maya.

MARK

You weren't mean.

SKY

Why did you tell her to go upstairs, then?

MARK

Because of what you called her.

SKY
What did I call her?

MARK
A nanny.

SKY
What's wrong with that? When I was
a baby we had a nanny and she
looked like Maya and I loved her.

MARK

SKY
Daddy?!

MARK
There's a history of things.

SKY
I don't understand.

MARK
Well, history is like before, only
not like yesterday before, but like
a thousand yesterdays.

SKY
Before I was born?

MARK
Way before you were born.

SKY
Before you were born?

MARK
WAYYYYYYYYY before.

SKY
When the monsters crushed the
stones?

MARK
After that.

SKY
I like this story.

MARK
Well, in this long before place,
there were people who were called -
well, maybe it's not important what
they were called.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

The thing is that, one group of people felt like they could own another group.

SKY

How can you own a person?

MARK

There's something called hate.

SKY

What's hate?

MARK

It's like... you have something in you that you can't....that you just ... like you're afraid of other people. And you're so greedy that you want to hurt them.

SKY

I never want to meet people like that.

MARK

We all can be like that. And sometimes when a lot of people decide to hate at the same time, they hurt the world.

SKY

Is the world hurt now?

MARK becomes GASPING WHITENESS.

GASPING WHITENESS

Lights!

The house lights are turned on.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

(points to SKY and the empty place where MARK was)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Look at this man in his garden
Stumbling for language while his
ancestors crouch behind unspoken
syllables
Screaming so loud that he's choking
on their voices.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Look at them, tumbling out of the
soil, twisting in the roots,
longing for sky.

Some were poets
Some worked in mines
Some loved their children so deeply
that they ached.
Some stood on porches on
plantations that stretched as far
as the eye could see.
Some baked desserts as sweet as
miracles.
Some died fighting for justice.
And some burned down entire
villages filled with people they
didn't know, in a land with
thousands of years of history that
they called new.

So what are the words to tell his
daughter where she comes from?

And, if he starts speaking, what
part of his carefully-made middle
class world will be shattered under
the weight of all that truth?

And what will be left for her when
the dust settles?

GASPING WHITENESS becomes MARK again

SKY

DADDY! You didn't answer my
question. Is the world hurt now?

MARK

Yes, honey, it is.

SKY

Who hurt it?

MARK

Regular people.

SKY

People like us.

MARK

Yep.

SKY

Why?

MARK

They decided that they could boss people around, and if they didn't do it, they would hurt them.

SKY

Why?

MARK

Because they were greedy. And afraid.

SKY

What were they afraid of

MARK

(after a pause)

I don't know the answer to that one.

SKY

Is that all they did?

MARK

They also took other people's homes.

SKY

Even if the people had no place to stay?

MARK

Even if the people got very sick.

Pause.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's ok to cry.

He holds her.

SKY

I miss mom.

MARK

I know.

SKY

She sings me lullabies.

MARK

My mom always said that stars are the fingerprints of people who passed away.

SKY

Which one are mom's fingerprints?

MARK

I don't know.

SKY

You think she's up there watching us?

MARK

I think so. I think all the people who ever lived are up there watching us.

SKY

Even the people who hurt everyone?

MARK

(after a pause)

Yes. Even them.

PART TWO

1.

The garden. The middle of the night.

MAYA stands in the garden in her pajamas, looking up a sky filled with stars, her doll in her hands. A flashlight lies on the ground beside her.

MAYA

Once upon a time there was a girl named Maya. She loved the moon and Serena Williams.

In her old neighborhood, the sidewalk glittered, her fire escape was a spaceship, and the stars called her by her name.

But now, she lives in a place her mom calls "a new beginning" but she calls boring, 'cause no one ever sits on their stoop.

The streets in this new place are as long as spaghetti and the kids talk as slow as sloths and when they walk to school they walk far ahead of her. And make fun of her. And laugh.

A light goes on in her mom's bedroom. MAYA picks up her flashlight and runs back inside. She talks as she runs.

After they moved in, Maya found a doll in the bottom of a moving box. It had a brown fabric face but no eyes and no mouth.

"That was your great grandmother's," said her mom in a voice filled with church.

"Her name was Cora."

MAYA arrives in her bedroom. She crouches in her bed with her doll and her flashlight. MAYA caresses her cheek with the doll's hand.

Maya looked at the doll. It had skin as brown as love and cinnamon and soft cotton hands.

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)

Her mom said that Cora, her great grandmother, was a nanny. That she took care of white people's babies in the days before the internet.

Maya closed her eyes and tried to imagine Cora. What her hands looked like. How she talked. And if she laughed.

Maya imagined her great grandmother holding her. Holding her with warm hands that held babies and dolls of cinnamon and Maya's beating heart.

SHANDA

(from off)

Maya, are you up?

MAYA turns off her flashlight and lies down. SHANDA enters.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

What's wrong, Maya?

MAYA is crying. SHANDA embraces her and kisses her head.

MAYA

I don't know.

SHANDA holds MAYA. After a time.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Mama, what will I be when I am old?

SHANDA

You can be anything you want. You can be an astronaut or a nanny or a race car driver or a businesswoman, just like me.

MAYA

Why did Sky call me a nanny?

SHANDA

Maybe because some white people can't see how many things we could be. They're scared of what that would mean for them.

MAYA

Am I scary?

SHANDA

No, baby. No.

SHANDA hugs MAYA.

MAYA
I don't like it here.

SHANDA
I know.

MAYA
I miss our old neighborhood.

SHANDA

MAYA
I miss people sitting on the
stoop...do you miss it?

SHANDA
Sometimes.

MAYA
What do you miss?

SHANDA
Seeing you play with all your
friends.

SHANDA caresses MAYA.

MAYA
Can you tell me a story?

SHANDA
You know I'm no good at telling
stories!

MAYA
Try!

SHANDA
Ok....once upon a time-

MAYA
This isn't a once upon a time
story!

SHANDA
OK, once there was a beautiful
woman who loved her daughter so
much that she made up a bedtime
story even though she was really
bad at it.

MAYA

I like this story....

2.

The garden. GASPING WHITENESS enters, holding the doll of
BABY WHITE MAN.

GASPING WHITENESS

Shhh, baby. Man. White baby man.

(singing)

Rock a bye white baby man in the
tree top

When the wind blows, the cradle
will rock

(to audience)

EVERYBODY!

When the bow breaks

The cradle will fall

And down will come WHITE BABY MAN

Cradle and all.

Not even a yawn?! And I still have
100 million white men to put to
bed...

Every night, I dance across their
furrowed brows

My bare feet scalded by the fever
of their dreams

In the morning, they'll blame
stress, relationship trouble, the
late mortgage, or some immigrant
they've never met

But they are unsettled in their
dreams

Because they forgot

Or, they convinced themselves,

That this is theirs

This land

This water

This sense of confidence.

But lies erode like rain

(to WHITE BABY MAN)

Shhhhhh

Relax your body, sweet baby white
man!

I know, I know, with every
generation it takes more and more
force to maintain your denial

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

But the muscle tension!
The red face, the strained neck,
the yelling about how much you are
threatened.

You know it's not immigrants or
terrorists who are eroding your
ground -
Your ground has always been uneven
and shifting - that's the anxiety
of a thief.

Shhhhh, White Baby Man.
Let it go!
Let go, White Baby Man!
400 years of oppressing people can
be stressful. Hot yoga, anyone?
Your body is a dam ready to break!
But the collapse of your power is
not the same as the end of the
world
No matter how many guns are in your
militia.

OK. Let's not slip into the self-
righteousness of a college town!
Look around...

There's the place where she planted
wildflowers the day she found out
she was having a girl!

And there's the old elm tree where
he stood when he found out his dad
had had a stroke - and where he
spent 30 minutes picking bark off
the tree before going inside.

And there's the white linoleum
floor where oos and aaas and
gurgles suddenly came together into
a word that stopped time: "mama."

The day winds down. The sunlight
leaves dappled shadows on the front
porch

"How was your day?" "Can you turn
off Sky's bath?" "You look tired,
honey."

They live lives of anxiety and
grace in the shadow of genocide.

3.

MAYA's bedroom.

SHANDA
...so this beautiful woman-

MAYA
You said that.

SHANDA
You want me to tell you a story or not?

MAYA
Yes!

SHANDA
Ok, so this beautiful woman told her daughter that she deals with people who say stupid things all the time.

MAYA
Uh-huh.

SHANDA
Usually, she speaks up - that's the kind of woman she is. But sometimes she doesn't.

MAYA
Really?

SHANDA
Uh-huh. She has all kinds of feelings, actually. Sometimes she cries.

MAYA
She does?

SHANDA
She does. And sometimes she doesn't have time for all that. So she is direct.

MAYA
What do you mean?

SHANDA
Sometimes, I just call it for what it is. LIGHTS!

The house lights go on.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

This song is dedicated to white,
middle class, straight dudes.

The performer playing MAYA stands and the performer playing
SKY enters. They become back up singers

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS

White dudes, white dudes, what's a
dude to do?

SHANDA

Men who drink Kombucha and compost.

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS

White dudes, white dudes, what's a
dude to do?

SHANDA

And post Rumi quotes on their
FaceBook pages.

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS

White dudes, white dudes, what's a
dude to do?

SHANDA

Who grew up on hip hop but who
never freestyle in public because
it's kind of appropriative, right?

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS

White dudes, white dudes, what's a
dude to do?

SHANDA

Who secretly really like the Maya
Angelou poem "Still, I rise" even
if it isn't really hardcore.

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS

White dudes, white dudes, what's a
dude to do?

SHANDA

Who subconsciously believe that
saying "I'm a racist jerk" enough
times is a really righteous thing
to do.

MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS
 White dudes, white dudes, what's a
 dude to do?

SHANDA
 Who have lost track of all the
 movements and identities that they
 are allies to.

MAYA and SKY PERFORMERS freeze.

SHANDA (CONT'D)
 And who harbor a gnawing suspicion
 that none of this is enough.

SHANDA, MAYA AND SKY PERFORMERS:
 This is a plaintive, melancholy,
 ambivalent love song for white,
 middle class, straight men.

It's a blues song in the key of
 loneliness
 Of feeling powerless
 When you have more power than
 almost anyone ever in the whole
 entire world
 And yet you can't talk to anyone
 about it
 Because no one who isn't a middle
 class white dude wants to hear it
 And you are too afraid to talk to
 other white dudes about this
 feeling
 Because you secretly hate other
 white dudes
 Because they remind you of yourself

SKY PERFORMER
 Is this a moment to grow
 dreadlocks?

SHANDA AND MAYA PERFORMERS
 NO!

SHANDA
 This is for all the white dudes who
 have never, ever used the phrase
 "post-racial" to describe the
 United States.

SKY AND MAYA PERFORMERS
 Uh-uh!

SHANDA

And who rip apart with gleeful, self-righteous vengeance any white person who says anything that could be remotely interpreted as racist.

And ignore the voices inside them that say they only do that because they are afraid that, if a white dude next to them says some stupid stuff, it would expose all the horrible things that THEY would probably say if they didn't police themselves with a puritanical fervor.

MAYA PERFORMER

How long will it take before a progressive white person makes another feel invisible through passive aggressive self-righteous comments and a not so subtle physical positioning that emphasizes their own superiority?

SKY PERFORMER

How long?

MAYA PERFORMER

As soon as a person of color enters the room!

MAYA makes a rim shot sound.

SHANDA

One day in a liberal college town I met a hundred white intellectuals. I asked them to tell me about racism. I heard stories of self-reflection and personal confession. Of mixed-race ancestry. And slaves in the family.

My knees shook. My heart sank. My quivers quivered.

But, as I walked home, I imagined all these beautiful, honest, middle class white people putting their children to bed in these beautiful, quiet homes and I wondered if all of their individual work on their personal prejudices were lullabies, opiates, to keep structural change at bay.

MAYA PERFORMER

I love middle class self-hatred, because when people are ripping themselves apart it is really hard for them to help tear down the criminal justice system.

SKY PERFORMER

Or the school-to-prison pipeline.

MAYA PERFORMER

Or capitalism.

SHANDA

White duuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuudes!

The house lights go out. SKY PERFORMER exits. MAYA and SHANDA return to the bedroom.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

And THAT is the end of my story.

Pause.

MAYA

Mama?

SHANDA

Yes, Maya?

MAYA

Do we have to be tools for white people's self-discovery in every story?

SHANDA

No, Maya, there are many, many stories where our voices are at the center.

MAYA

Can I can climb out of *this* story and into one of *those*?

SHANDA

Maybe.

MAYA looks out the window. She takes the keys out of her doll's chest. She hangs keys to the stars. She reaches for them. They hold her. She steps out of her window, her doll in her hand, and swings out across the night.

Quiet and then GASPING WHITENESS enters.

4.

GASPING WHITENESS

Well, who will be the narrator now?
Maybe me.

Lights slowly change to dusk.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Or maybe the voices inside his
head.

GASPING WHITENESS becomes MARK, working in the garden. As in Act One, the same actor plays both MARK and GASPING WHITENESS.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Listen to the voices...
When he is alone, when there is
enough quiet to hear himself, he
feels a quiver - some old feeling,
not quite a memory. There's an
emptiness then and vertigo, as if
he is on top of a mountain, and
that mountain is on top of a
mountain, and this old house with
this tiny garden is teetering at
the tippy top, and he can see
everyone in the towns and cities
below him.

And he wonders, in those moments,
about the effort his soul is making
to live every day atop this
screaming inequality and convince
himself that it is normal.

SKY enters.

SKY

Hi, Papa.

MARK

Hi, sweet.

SKY

Will you walk with me?

MARK

As soon as I finish picking the kale.

SKY

I hate kale.

GASPING WHITENESS

What kind of effort did it take to close his eyes? To not see?

MARK

Just about done.

SKY

And then can we walk?

MARK

Yup.

GASPING WHITENESS

And, deep in his heart, is a part of him grateful for this denial, because it allows him to kiss his daughter and walk through life?

But what places inside himself are cut off, invisible, because of all the parts of the world he is turning away from?

And is this denial contagious?

MARK wipes the dirt off of his hands, and gets up. SKY and MARK walk.

SKY

What's that sound?

MARK

I think it's a blue jay.

SKY

It sounds like he's laughing.

Pause.

SKY (CONT'D)
Papa?

MARK
Yeah?

SKY
Am I mean?

MARK
No, you're not mean.

GASPING WHITENESS
They do not know they are emperors
But their empire will fall
Tomorrow or the next day or the day
after that.
It will fall.

SKY
Where does the sun go after it goes
down?

MARK
To bed. Just like you should.

MARK and SKY turn to exit.

GASPING WHITENESS
So why don't they help tear down
the house on top of that mountain,
rather than falling with it when it
comes tumbling down?

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, GASPING WHITENESS takes the
mask off his face and begins to put it on the face of SKY.

Lights fade.

PART III

1.

Evening. Mark alone in the garden. He pours soil through his fingertips. He looks up at the stars.

MARK

Can you hear me, Genevieve?

I know I usually talk to you before
I go to bed...is it weird to think
I get better reception then?

I finally cleaned out the medicine
cabinet. Your toothbrush, your make
up...your self-help notes.

Are you there?

Pause.

Sky keeps asking me if she's mean.
It's like she's taken on some
violence I didn't even know we were
carrying and the only way she can
make sense of it is to blame
herself.

I miss you.

Silence. MARK begins to cough, as if something is stuck in his throat. He hears a voice inside his head.

MARK (CONT'D)

You're not real. You're inside my
head.

From inside him, the voice of GASPING WHITENESS. This is the first time we have heard the voice of GASPING WHITENESS without seeing the mask.

GASPING WHITENESS

I am real. And I am inside your
head. And his. And hers. And
theirs.

MARK

GASPING WHITENESS

I know what you're thinking. But I
want to go back. I ache for the
company of bones.

MARK

Go then.

GASPING WHITENESS

I can't. You have to bury me first.

MARK

Bury you? How?

GASPING WHITENESS

No big deal. Just remake the world inside the remains of this one.

Or...

(winking)

...lend a hand to the people who've been doing that all along.

(yelling)

LIGHTS!

Lights change. The mood is off-kilter, as if someone took the whole world, cut it open with a razor, then pasted it together, pretending to hide the scar.

Although he doesn't wear the mask, MARK fully embodies GASPING WHITENESS: the voice, the gestures, the glee mixed with self-righteousness mixed with sadism mixed with fear.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

A funeral for Gaspig Whiteness,
set in the not-too-distant-future.

The house explodes with the sound of New Orleans' second line music. In a fit of feverish exaltation, MARK/GASPING WHITENESS dances through the audience, perhaps getting them to join.

Then, with no warning at all, GASPING WHITENESS shifts to solemnity.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

We are gathered here today to mourn the passing of Gaspig Whiteness.

Gaspig Whiteness came here to call out, er, call *in*, progressive white people. And now he is gone, or leaving, or-

MARK momentarily drops the GASPING WHITENESS voice.

MARK

Can I stop now?

GASPING WHITENESS

NO!!!

(back to audience)

Progressive white people came from many places, and many races, but were connected by their inability to decide exactly what whiteness was.

Was it that thin layer of gauze they laid on top of their skin that made them gleam their way to the top and forget the foods and accents of their ancestors?

Was it a collective amnesia that allowed them to walk on the bones of the dead while listening to selfhelp podcasts?

It was hard to tell, because whiteness was always loose fitting, never actually white, and hard to wash off because it was made of the same material as the empire. And the empire wasn't like a tablecloth that you could just pull quickly off the table and leave the glasses still standing up.

As he says this last line, a tisted, white cloth falls from the cieling. GASPING WHITENESS catches it, snaps it like a wet towel in a locker room, then throws it over the audience.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Catch it! Whiteness is slippery!

He runs through the audience, trying to catch it, like a fan running after a beach ball at a baseball game.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Excuse me, pardon me, pardon me, excuse me, hey, I like those earrings, you free after the funeral?

Finally, GASPING WHITENESS grabs hold of the white fabric and kisses it.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Shhh, it's ok baby, I understand. They do love you. If they didn't love you, they would actually let you go.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

OK, it's time for what every funeral needs to keep death light - a game!

Game show music.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

This is called "hot potato, white body" - a game where everyone wins by denying that they are playing! I'm going to pass this around to the other progressive white people in the room - identify yourself by doing a yoga pose - and when you hold it, you say, as quickly as you can, one thing you tell people to pretend you're not really white.

For example, "I'm white, but my people came to the U.S. super poor"

Or "I'm white...but at least I'm not like, Waspy white"

Or "I prefer to think of myself as a lighter shade of pale."

Or maybe this one: "My ancestors weren't here during slavery!"

As if you are not benefiting from the people who were.

Oh, come on, my progressive white friends. You know I'm just regurgitating the incomplete thoughts you try to swallow before they become words.

What if you stopped all that work? For a moment. And wiped away your pretense like beads of southern sweat.

What if you asked yourself:

Is there some part of me that LIKES the power?

And the travel?

And the freedom?

And the wealth?

Even you, my professors and artists and white prophets filled with tears.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

Are you, just maybe, white
 profiteers? Living on the system
 you smugly deride, on top of the
 world and critiquing it at the same
 time?

But I digress

Lights begin to dim.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

You came into this *theatron* and
 then time twisted and bent
 We are not where we were

Just outside this little bubble,
 This theatuh, the era of white
 power is ending

Hard to imagine?

Maybe because you came into this
 room just as the people were rising
 up.

Lights continue to dim.

That's why I am being buried, you
 see. The birth of an Indigenous-
 centered, multi-gendered, cross-
 class, multi-racial, queer
 inclusive revolution that is
 accessible to every body - and is
 led by poor people.

They picked up the shards of
 themselves discarded by the hands
 that held them down, and they've
 made a garden out it, where they've
 seeded a new world...in the coldest
 moment before the hottest days.

And I have to lie down when the
 people rise up.

The lights are now completely black. From the darkness.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

(singing)

This is the end
 My only friend
 The end

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

But I digress.

Lights come up to full. MARK has taken off his outer layer, revealing an undershirt and the mask of GASPING WHITENESS covering his heart.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

And besides, some of you, dear friends, have lived your whole lives as white people. Others of you...

ADULT MAYA enters, now in her mid-thirties - played by the actress who played SHANDA.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

...haven't.
You remember Maya, right? She's in her thirties now. She just got her PhD in astronomy and is looking for a job in academia. Anyone here work in academia?

Maya bought this house when Mark decided to sell it. She just finished gluing stars onto the ceiling of her son's bedroom.

(to Maya)

Maya, this is a funeral for Gaspig Whiteness. Anything you'd like to say to the huddled masses?

ADULT MAYA

Excuse me?

GASPING WHITENESS

This is a funeral for-

ADULT MAYA

No, I heard you..

GASPING WHITENESS

Well...

ADULT MAYA

I just don't know what it means.

GASPING WHITENESS

Well, we recognize that whiteness is a myth, so we need to bury it in order to imagine a new paradigm for our identities.

MAYA takes her phone out.

ADULT MAYA

Terry, I'm going to be late. Can you start cooking the tempeh?

MAYA hangs up the phone.

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

Turn on the lights.

The house lights go up.

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

I've felt a lot of things about white folks. Mostly distrust, sometimes rage, a few moments of true love, but usually just a collection of unsaid things. But this moment, this is the first time I have felt pity.

A funeral? For whiteness? Because you have decided its time.

Hell, no! Part of what keeps white people quiet is the shame and fear of looking at themselves. And we all grow up inside that fear.

I was raised on the stories of my family, but when I came into the classroom, my stories were footnotes. I poured over the footnotes and I made them a novel and I read that novel aloud until it sounded like my life.

So fuck the funeral for whiteness! Keep it above ground. As a matter of fact, put it at eye level. So you can't help but look at it. And notice when you look away. And then look *back*.

And, uh, I'm not sticking around to watch you do that. I'm gonna pick up my son David from the babysitter, grab a bottle of wine for my wife, and head home. Black people, people of color, people of the global majority, you can come with me if you want.

(MORE)

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

That's a real invitation. It's my son's bedtime. Every night, we tell him stories - about the world he was born into and the world we are dreaming into life. If you come with me, you can tell stories, too.

We have snacks.

MAYA exits, possibly with people of color members of the audience.

GASPING WHITENESS

Just can't get her to stay in this show! But then again, I'm not staying, either. Just one morning left.

(gestures to SKY, who has just entered)

SKY enters and looks out at MARK/GASPING WHITENESS, who now returns to the voice of MARK.

SKY

There's my Dad. He lives in an assisted living facility now. His sense of time is one of the many things that dementia has slipped away.

He wakes up in a cold sweat and stumbles out of his room, past the snoring front desk staff, and out to the garden.

He digs his hands into the soil, thinking of a mask that still haunts the edges of his dreams.

MARK

And there's my daughter, Sky. She's a firefighter out west.

She wakes from a dream, pushing off her covers, surprised to see her hands covered with soot - then remembering that she collapsed in bed without scrubbing them off.

SKY

They think of each other, at the same moment.

MARK

Mark of a morning long ago when his
daughter made monster sounds

SKY

And Sky of a friend that she never
made.

MARK

Two small moments.

SKY

Nothing, really.

MARK

But still.

MARK lies down on the garden, doing the backstroke.

SKY

Mark starts to swim, as if he is
alone in a far away sea. And he
speaks up at the stars as if
they're the glowing face of his
daughter.

MARK

Remember the time you woke up at
dawn, threw the back door open, and
ran into the yard?

SKY

He says

MARK

How should I describe the light?
Bone White? Misty gray?

SKY

And he tells her about the days
when she was filled with fire and
how he wanted so hard to get it
right that he was afraid to let her
get it wrong. And about what it
feels to live the full arc of a
life and still love his daughter
this much.

MARK stops swimming, sitting up in the soil.

MARK

Unable to sleep, Sky sits up in
bed, grabs her phone, and texts her
dad.

SKY

Mark sees the front desk staff stirring so he rushes back to his room, and the door clicks closed just as the front desk staff wake up.

MARK stands.

MARK

Mark's eyes adjust to the room and he sees his phone glowing underneath a stack of paper. He shoves it aside to see a text from Sky.

SKY

You know what I love about you?

MARK

The text reads.

SKY

You always tried to give me words for things. Even when you failed. And you never stopped trying.

MARK

Mark doesn't realize he is crying until he feels the tears on his lips. So he goes to the bathroom to wash his face.

MARK puts his hand on his chest, cupping the mask of GASPING WHITENESS.

MARK (CONT'D)

As he sees, in the mirror, the mask of Gaspig Whiteness.

SKY

And he sees the eyes of Gaspig Whiteness for the first time. They are his own

MARK

This is why.

SKY

He realizes.

MARK

Why he was trying so hard to find
words. Gasping Whiteness is made
out of silence.

Pause.

SKY

And Mark grabs a piece of paper and
scribbles a poem with soil-covered
fingers.

MARK

A poem that has taken him a
lifetime to write.

SKY

Many lifetimes.

MARK

If I love my skin so deeply
I will love the bones that hold it
And see the land that birthed it
And find something buried there.

A voice

A memory

A seed

Planted in the skin of empire.

And if I plant my children's roots
Into that deepest, loving soil
Soil nourished by our futures
And all the songs that came before
Then I will listen
And write
And sing
And fight

And remember who I was

Before I was white.

MARK reaches into the air and grabs a thread, previously
unseen. He attaches the mask of GASPING WHITENESS to it.
MARK looks at it as if he is looking at a mirror.

Mark breathes deeply. He wipes the soil off his hands. He
turns to exit.

At the very last moment, he turns to the audience.

MARK PERFORMER

Oh, you thought this ceremony ended
in this room?

(MORE)

MARK PERFORMER (CONT'D)

This isn't a ritual like a wedding.
 This is something that we conduct
 every. Single. Day. And then we
 teach our children to do it.
 So maybe it isn't a funeral.
 Maybe it's a way to unbury
 ourselves.

SKY PERFORMER

Ok, my people who don't like to be
 called my people. This is it.
 This ritual ends when we begin to
 let go.

MAYA PERFORMER

What will middle class white people
 give up to help end the era of
 white power?

SKY PERFORMER

Will we seek out other white people
 who can help us untangle this power
 from the way we see, the way we
 move in the world?

Can we do that without ripping
 ourselves to shreds?

MAYA PERFORMER

Will you trace your bloodlines and
 acknowledge history's lies and
 teach your children they can be
 beautiful while still opening their
 eyes?

SKY PERFORMER

Will we research our family money
 and find out the shape and weight
 of the ground we're standing on?

MAYA PERFORMER

Will we look at the complicated
 relationship between race and class
 And keep asking questions, even
 when it gets hard?

SKY PERFORMER

And when we feel that defensiveness
 rising up, will we recognize that
 we might just be afraid?

MAYA PERFORMER

Will we open up our homes to
refugees?

SKY PERFORMER

And remember that we could become
refugees again?

MAYA PERFORMER

Will we join the Poor People's
Campaign?

SKY PERFORMER

And read about reparations in the
Movement for Black Lives platform?

MAYA PERFORMER

Will you join Showing up for Racial
Justice?

SKY PERFORMER

Or [insert name of local group
here].

MAYA PERFORMER

Will we return land to Indigenous
people who are dead in history
books but living next door?

SKY PERFORMER

Will we listen deeply and
generously and in support of the
leadership of Black people,
Indigenous people, and people of
color?

MAYA PERFORMER

And will we do our work, so our
children don't have to do it alone?

SHANDA PERFORMER enters.

SHANDA PERFORMER

And will we work to recognize that
white supremacy is not only outside
of us - it is trained into us
And convinces us to perform
respectability politics inside
rooms where we will never be fully
seen.

MAYA PERFORMER

And it plays images over and over
again of many white people's fears
of us.

SHANDA PERFORMER

And turns those fears into masks
and puts them on our children.
To get them to forget where white
supremacy ends...

MAYA PERFORMER

...and our skin begins.

3. The lights slowly shift to dusk. MARK PERFORMER exits.
MAYA and SKY PERFORMERS lie down and go to sleep. As they do,
SHANDA PERFORMER turns around and begins singing a lullaby.
When she turns back, she is ADULT MAYA, cradling a baby.

ADULT MAYA

What's that, David? A piece of
glass? How'd that get in the
garden?

She picks it up, puts it in her pocket.

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

Mama, remember how I was always
trying to get you up to go outside
to watch the sunset, but you were
always too tired? You worked so
much.

(to David)

I'm talking to your grandma!

Last night, Dad and I were talking
about how you took care of me when
he was deployed and I thought,

"How did you do it? Teach me how
rough the world can be and still
hold me like I was the most
precious thing you'd ever touched?
Were you ever afraid that I'd
become as hard as the world?"

Sometimes I close my eyes and
listen for your voice. You said you
were the worst storyteller in the
world but I always thought your
voice was honey.

Will you tell me a story?

ADULT MAYA looks up at the stars.

End of play.