

GASPING

By Will MacAdams

With contributions of the ensembles (2016-2021)

GASPING HAS BEEN DEVELOPED OVER A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS, READINGS, CONVERSATIONS, AND MEALS.

THANK YOU to:

Trenda Loftin (performer from 2017 -2019 & co-director/post-play workshop leader for the 2019 tour) who raised vital questions, held space with bravery and with care, 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 and extraordinary artistic gifts made the play possible.

Uwizeyimana (Wize) Angelique (workshop facilitator for the 2019 tour & performer in October, 2018) who is helping to envision how the piece might be shared and take root.

THANK YOU to the 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.

THANK YOU to the community hosts and organizing partners who helped produce the 2019 tour of readings of the play. 100% of the proceeds benefited BIPOC-led cultural/organizing work.

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).

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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).

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GASPING is performed by a four-person ensemble:

Ensemble Member 1 (White, 8-11) plays Sky and other characters, as described below

Ensemble Member 2 (White, late 30s) plays Mark, Gasping Whiteness, and other characters, as described below

Ensemble Member 3 (African-American, 9-12) plays Maya and other characters, as described below

Ensemble Member 4 (African-American, late 30s) plays Shanda, Adult Maya, and other characters, as described below.

GASPING is set in the backyard garden of a duplex in a progressive, middle class, majority-white community.

Present day.

Performances begin with a land acknowledgment and are followed by workshops for audience members to reflect, share stories, and organize.

Workshop outlines and other organizing tools can be found in our *Toolkit for Community Presentations* at www.gaspingtheplay.com.

PART ONE

1.

SKY (7 years old) plants seeds in her backyard garden while her father, MARK, writes.

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 this 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.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

My hand on your little back.
The impossibly delicate rise and
fall of your breath.

2.

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

MAYA

(to her doll)

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...the desert.

Will you hold his keys until he
gets back? You don't need *pockets*.
You can tuck them under your heart!

MAYA tucks the keys into a rip in the doll's chest and 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

(loud)

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 just 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 touch her and 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
(after a pause)
I saw the little girl downstairs.

MAYA

SHANDA

She's with her dad in the garden.
I'm afraid they're gonna 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 go 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. One night,
when her mom was asleep, she opened
her window and took out her keys
and hung them from the stars.

SHANDA
Uh huh...

MAYA

Then Ember swung from key to key
all the way across the night and
she hung from a star over a big
desert - where she saw her daddy,
asleep.

She climbed down carefully from the
desert star and landed right next
to him and kissed him on the
forehead - right where the wrinkle
is when his face scrunches up when
he's sad.

He didn't wake up. But he smiled,
deep in his sleep.

Then Ember jumped up and swung all
the way across the sky and climbed
back into her bedroom. JUST as the
sun was coming up.

SHANDA kisses 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.

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.

GASPING WHITENESS

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

Some say whiteness, it is a razor,
that leaves your soul to bleed.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

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 sniffs the air like a dog investigating.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

My name is
 (gasps for breath)
 ---Whiteness
 (gasps for breath)
 ---Whiteness.
 (coughs)
 GASPING Whiteness.

The air is thin on top of the
 patriarchy....

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 then I felt THAT ITCH.
 The particular itch that I feel
 when middle class 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.

Quiet.

SKY 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. 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 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 tomorrow. Don't go playing in the garden.

MAYA

Why?

The sound of a door slamming, downstairs.

MAYA (CONT'D)

What was that?

SHANDA

Probably that 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
 will always fight for you. Always.

MAYA
 Do I have to fight?

SHANDA
 Sometimes.

MAYA looks very 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.

After a pause.

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 father's
 child.

MAYA
 He's way worse! Remember when he
 stuck five pretzels in his mouth
 and tried to tell me 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. 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)

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, 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 of
plantations with fields as far as
the eye could see
Some spoke German in Wisconsin or
Yiddish on the Lower East Side
Some baked desserts as sweet as
miracles
Some fought for justice

And some burned down entire
villages in lands 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.

MARK looks up at the sky.

PART TWO

1.

The backyard. Middle of the night.

MAYA stands in the yard 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 faaaaaaar ahead of her. And make fun of her. And laugh.

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

MAYA closes her eyes and touches her face with the doll's hand.

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.

(MORE)

MAYA (CONT'D)

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 own heart.

SHANDA enters the garden in her night clothes.

SHANDA

Maya, it is one o'clock in the-

MAYA runs into her mom's arms, crying.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

MAYA

I don't know.

SHANDA holds MAYA.

SHANDA

Baby, I need you to talk to me. I know I'm busy. But it doesn't mean I don't have time for you.

MAYA exhales. A breeze blows through the yard and SHANDA and MAYA listen to it.

MAYA

Mama, what will I be when I'm 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.

After a pause.

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.

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.

MAYA grabs her mom's hand. SHANDA looks at her daughter, picks up the flashlight, and guides her toward the house. As they walk:

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....

They exit.

2.

GASPING WHITENESS enters the garden, holding the doll of BABY WHITE MAN. The mask is now on the face of GASPING WHITENESS.

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

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

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

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 birch tree where he stood when he found out his dad had a stroke - and where he spent 30 minutes picking off bark 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.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

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, when people act like they're the most important thing in the world, she reminds herself of how *small* they are.

MAYA

How does she do THAT?

SHANDA

LIGHTS!

The house lights go on. SHANDA stands and clears her throat dramatically.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

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

The performer playing MAYA stands. The performers playing SKY and GASPING WHITENESS enter. The three of them become BACK UP SINGERS.

BACK UP SINGERS

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

SHANDA

Men who drink Kombucha and compost.

BACK UP SINGERS

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

SHANDA

And post Rumi quotes on our FaceBook pages.

BACK UP SINGERS

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?

BACK UP SINGERS

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.

BACK UP SINGERS

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

SHANDA

Who subconsciously believe that
saying

GASPING WHITENESS

"I'm a racist jerk"

SHANDA

enough times is a really righteous
thing to do.

BACK UP SINGERS

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

SHANDA

Who've lost track of all the
movements and identities that they
are allies to.

The BACK UP SINGERS freeze.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

And who harbor a gnawing suspicion
that none of this is enough.

This is a plaintive, melancholy,
ambivalent 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, straight white dude wants to
hear it
And you are too afraid to talk to
other white dudes about this
feeling

(MORE)

SHANDA (CONT'D)

Because you secretly hate other
white dudes
Because they remind you of yourself

GASPING WHITENESS

Is this a moment to grow
dreadlocks?

SHANDA & MAYA

NO!

SHANDA

This song is for all the white
dudes who have never, ever used the
phrase

GASPING WHITENESS

Post Racial

SHANDA

To describe the United States.

MAYA, SKY

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're only doing 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

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

How long?

MAYA

As soon as a person of color enters
the room!

SKY makes a rim shot sound.

GASPING WHITENESS

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 enslaved people in the family.

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

SHANDA

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 are lullabies,
opiates, to keep structural change
at bay.

MAYA

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

Or the school-to-prison pipeline.

GASPING WHITENESS

Or capitalism.

SHANDA

White duuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuudes!

The house lights go out. The performers playing SKY and
GASPING WHITENESS exit.

Back to MAYA's bedroom. SHANDA opens her eyes.

SHANDA (CONT'D)

(stirring)

Was I asleep?

MAYA nods her head.

SHANDA (CONT'D)
For how long?

MAYA
I don't know...I was looking out
the window.
(after a pause)
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
(after a breath)
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.

During the following lines, GASPING WHITENESS slowly becomes MARK, working in the garden.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

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 sky.

MARK

Can you hear me, Genevieve?

I know I usually talk to you late at night...is it weird to think I get better reception then?

I finally cleaned out the medicine cabinet. Your toothbrush. Your lip balm...your self-help notes.

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 coughs. The coughing gets worse.

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 push open the knotted roots of your history and dig...swim back through time, leap across generations, comb through bloodlines, slide down bones... and then look up at the stolen land you've been standing on so you can plant seeds for a new world inside the remains of this one.

Or 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, 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 self-help 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.

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 empire of Gaspig
Whiteness is dying.

Hard to imagine?

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

Lights continue to dim.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

That's why I am being buried, you see. The birth of a Indigenous-centered, multi-gendered, 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 of them. They're planting a new world in it...in the coldest moment before the hottest days.

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

The lights are now completely out. From the darkness.

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

(singing)

This is the end
My only friend
The end

But I digress.

Lights come up to full. In the darkness, MARK has taken off his outer layer and thrown it on the ground, 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.

(MORE)

GASPING WHITENESS (CONT'D)

She just finished gluing stars onto the ceiling of her son's bedroom.

(to Maya)

Maya, this is a funeral for Gasping 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)

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.

(MORE)

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

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. Turn on the house lights!

House lights go on.

Black people, BIPOC friends, people of the global majority, you can come with me if you want.

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're dreaming into life.

If you come with me, you can tell stories, too.

We have snacks.

MAYA exits, possibly with BIPOC 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 day left.

So much time has passed. Mark lies in a cold sweat in an assisted living facility. His sense of time is just one of the many things that dementia has slipped away.

Sky, a firefighter out west, wakes up and thinks about him. Or maybe catches a glimpse of him at the frayed edges of a dream.

GASPING WHITENESS slowly becomes MARK, moving toward the garden.

From offstage, the voice of SKY.

SKY

(from off)

He gets out of bed and stumbles out of his room, past the snoring front desk staff, and opens the door, into the garden.

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

MARK

(to the stars)

Hello, Sky!

SKY

He says, as I push off my covers, surprised to see my hands covered with soot - before remembering that I collapsed into bed without scrubbing them off.

We think of each other, at the same moment.

MARK

Me of a morning long ago when you made monster sounds.

SKY

And me of a friend that I never made.

Two small moments.
Nothing, really.

MARK

But still.

MARK lies down on the garden, doing the backstroke.

SKY

He starts to swim, as if he is alone in a far away sea.

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

He stumbles back to his room and sees his phone glowing under a pile of unfinished letters. A text from Sky.

SKY (CONT'D)

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.

He doesn't realize he is crying until he feels the tears on his lips. So he goes to the bathroom to wash his face and sees, in the mirror, the mask of Gasping Whiteness.

MARK

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

Pause.

SKY

He grabs a newspaper and scribbles
a poem in the margins with soil-
covered fingers.

A poem that has taken him a
lifetime to write.

MARK

Many lifetimes.

If I love my skin so deeply
I will love the bones that hold it
And see the ground 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. MARK slowly, carefully, removes the mask of GASPING
WHITENESS from his heart, and attaches it to the thread. He
wipes the soil off his hands.

MARK looks at the mask. Breathes. Looks at the mask again.
Perhaps tries to touch it but stops himself. He turns to
exit.

At the very last moment, the performer playing MARK turns to
the audience.

MARK PERFORMER

Oh, you thought this ceremony ended
in this room?

This isn't a ritual like a wedding.
(MORE)

MARK PERFORMER (CONT'D)

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.

The performers playing MAYA and SKY enter.

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?

MARK PERFORMER

And, once we let it go, how will it allow us to give possibilities to our children that we've never imagined?

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 back 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?

MARK 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

(MORE)

SHANDA PERFORMER (CONT'D)

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 exits.

MAYA and SKY lie down and go to sleep.

As they do, SHANDA turns. She starts to sing a lullaby. When
she turns back around, she is ADULT MAYA, cradling a baby.

ADULT MAYA

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

She picks it up, puts it in her pocket carefully. She looks
up at the sun going down.

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 sooooo
much.

(to David)

I'm talking to your grandma!

(back to the sky)

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?"

(MORE)

ADULT MAYA (CONT'D)

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.

(A breath)

Will you tell me a story?

ADULT MAYA looks up at the stars.

End of play.