

WATER WITHOUT BERRIES

a one-act in two scenes
by

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Synopsis:

Two brothers—a school teacher and Shakespearean actor—return to Harlem to persuade their infirm grandma to leave the tenement where they grew up. In this bittersweet drama, yearning, art, rivalry, and hope struggle against the relentless forces of reality.

Place: New York, Upper Manhattan

Time: Summer of 2002

Characters:

DANNY	27, a short, wiry, muscular man of mixed blood, with a rather light complexion. A teacher in the New Jersey Public School system, he teaches math to high schoolers. His wife, Janis, is expecting their first child.
TOUSSAINT	33, his half-brother, a gifted actor, tall, very good-looking, of a much darker complexion than Danny. His father is Haitian.
MAGGIE	73, their grandmother, plagued with arthritis. She brought the boys up when their mother, her daughter Mariel, went missing. Maggie, at the director's discretion, may be cast either as white or black. Her husband Bill, who died of a heart attack years ago, was black.

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Scene 1

SCENE: Upper Manhattan July 2002.

A penthouse on top of a five-story walk-up. The usual connotation of luxury does not apply. It is a penthouse only in the sense that it sits on top of the building, a sort of shack added onto the roof, consisting of a combination kitchen/living room, a bathroom, and two tiny bedrooms. The set shows only the kitchen/living room and a section of the roof beyond it, which is wildly overgrown with container plants. The front door is downstage right. There is a rickety screen door upstage center, leading out onto the roof, and a window upstage left, also looking out on the roof.

SOUND: Street sounds and music, anything from blaring radios to live steel drums, Peruvian flutes, hip-hop, salsa, jazz, blues or calypso is used throughout at the director's discretion.

AT RISE: Someone is practicing the saxophone on a nearby rooftop. It is about one o'clock in the afternoon on a hot July day. DANNY is moving around the room while listening on a cell phone. He looks into the refrigerator, opens cupboards, bangs them shut. He is irritated by the music and disgusted not only at being unable to reach his party. He puts the phone back into his bulging briefcase on the sofa without leaving a message. He sits for a moment. The sofa sags all the way to the floor. He has a hard time getting up. He wipes his face and switches on the window fan. It does not come on. He lifts up the window. The fan falls out.

DANNY

Jesus fuck!

(He sticks his head through the window and calls.)

Maggie?

(under his breath)

Bloody jungle.

The roof's dense potted flora, leafy and flowering plants, evergreens, vines, bushes, etc. reaches right up to the window. As DANNY pulls his head in, the window falls down. It won't stay up.

(DANNY is wrestling the useless fan back into the window when TOUSSAINT enters from downstage right. He sneaks up on Danny.)

TOUSSAINT

Hey little brother!

(They fall on the floor, hugging, punching, pummeling each other in way of greeting. The fan falls out again. The window, mysteriously, stays up. The two calm down and end up sitting on the floor looking at each other. DANNY picks his glasses off the floor, wipes them carefully, and puts them back on.)

TOUSSAINT

You look great, Danny-dunce. Great!

DANNY

Don't call me that.

TOUSSAINT

Great, no shit. How you been?

(He smiles at him warmly.)

Where is she?

(DANNY indicates the roof.)

Will you get a load of this. A fucking rainforest!

DANNY

Watch your language. You know how she hates obscenities. Where you been? I've been waiting, man. She's sitting out there, talking to her green babies.

TOUSSAINT

Her what?

DANNY

The plants.

TOUSSAINT

Let me say hi.

(He crawls through the window like a snake, disappears for a moment, then pops up again, spreading the greenery apart.)

'I shall be pinched to death.'

(He disappears. DANNY gets his phone out, dials and paces.)

DANNY

Janis no ...no! He only just got here. I can't leave. Call the school. ... Janis, please, don't give me a hard time. Just do it, sweetheart! Tell them I'm stuck in traffic. I don't know. Tell them security checks on the George Washington. Tell them

anything. Will you stop worrying? I promised I wouldn't without first My word count for *anything*?

(TOUSSAINT comes back, through the door)

.... I don't know yet ... I have no idea ...

TOUSSAINT

Are you talking to Janis? Tell her she'd better get her beautiful ass down to the play this time.

DANNY

... Toussaint says hi. *(He hangs up.)*

TOUSSAINT

(filling the kettle with water)

Maggie wants tea. I'm starved myself. How about a little lunch?

DANNY

There's nothing here, nothing, no food, nada! The cupboard is bare. Anyway, I have to get back to Jersey. You're two hours late.

TOUSSAINT

Rehearsal went over. Shit, I should rehearse right here. Talk about place! I don't need to create no nothing. My own private jungle.

(He is moving about, looking around like someone who hasn't been back for a long time. He opens the door to the bedroom, looks in, closes it, opens the door to the other room.)

Good God almighty!

(He disappears, comes back balancing a fancy clay pot.)

Have you seen what's in there? Looks like a plant shed. Our bed is piled with this stuff. I can't believe we shared this closet. We grew up in there, bro. One bed. Fucking amazing. You were an obstreperous little bastard. You always insisted on sleeping on the wall side.

DANNY

Because if I didn't, you'd kick me out in your sleep. Look, I don't have time to go down memory lane. I happen to have a job, I have papers to grade, I was supposed to be at a faculty meeting at two. What are we going to do about Maggie?

TOUSSAINT

She looks pretty good to me.

DANNY

She can barely move from arthritis. She sits out there all day talking to her plants. She won't leave the house because she is scared to death they'll change the locks on her. If she does go down to do the laundry it takes her hours to make it back up the stairs. And

the roof is about to fall in on the Gonzales's from all her plants. But she looks pretty good to you?

TOUSSAINT

How should I know what is going down

DANNY

You don't know because you don't bother to know. When is the last time you were here?

TOUSSAINT

I love that woman. I was touring. I was on the road, remember? A year and a half of one-night stands. Setting up and striking the bloody set every night, performing on a few hours' sleep. Conking out on the bus or in some lousy motel. Do you think it was easy? And you know something? I was good. I made it work. Audiences loved me. They couldn't get enough of me. I'm trying to make it in an insane business. I have plans. I have plans for that woman. I love that woman. You think I don't know the sacrifices she's made for us.

DANNY

What plans? You're thirty-three years old. You're doing another showcase!

TOUSSAINT

All right, it's simple. You're the one with the job. You take her to the burbs. I move in here and clean the place up. What's the matter? Janis won't let you? Can't get permission from the little wifey?

DANNY

You leave Janis out of this. You don't know what you're talking about. You should talk. I have been paying half the rent here. What are you contributing? What are they paying you? Come on tell me. Are they paying you carfare? Are they paying you that much? Is that what you're making on the deal?

TOUSSAINT

This is different. George is brilliant. He is a fucking genius. It's an exploration, a revolutionary production. This could make me, man. People are begging him to be in this production.

DANNY

How many blacks are in this *exploration*? How many? How many *actors of color*? One! You! Right? And what do you play? Caliban! Big surprise!

TOUSSAINT

It's a great part.

DANNY

If this production is so fucking revolutionary why aren't you playing Prospero? Now that would be novel. Why isn't some fucking white dude doing Caliban? Why isn't some fucking white dude crawling around the stage half-naked? Revolutionary! Your genius George is nothing but a fucking pimp. Show business – pimps and whores. You might as well hustle down on a hundred-twenty-fifth. You are being used.

THE LIGHTS change. The apartment lies in shadow, creating the effect of a dark, starless night. The whistle of the teakettle turns into the sound of an ambulance siren, there is traffic in the distance. LIGHT comes up on DANNY. His eyes are closed. He is leaning against the wall, listening to the agonized moans emanating from the boys' bedroom. The sounds fade away as he addresses the audience.

DANNY

I was fifteen. He kept me prisoner, nailed me to the bed when the shakes came. His arms like an iron cradle. In there, in our cell of a room, while our grandmother was out mopping up offices. I don't know what made him so strong. I don't know how he kept away from it. I never asked. I never even wondered. He was my big brother, it was natural he should protect me. Nothing touched him. He was immune, impervious, like he was charmed. Nobody ever picked on him. Why? Because he was big and beautiful? I don't know. Because he had a crazy French name nobody ever pronounced right? Grandma told me once he was a love child. Conceived in love. Unlike me, I guess. I was an accident, I guess. Love makes you strong, immune to hurt, she told me. I didn't know what she was talking about. Grandpa was dead of a heart-attack. Mom had vanished. I was a mess. I think it was his imagination. Off in some other stratosphere. He didn't need drugs to fly. My big brother. He was the only one who saw that I wasn't stupid. You got brains, Danny-dunce. You're smart, little brother. So now I'm a teacher. I have a wife, a family, an apartment, a life, Janis is pregnant. I have everything. So I get angry when I look at him and see him shortchanged, cheated. My brother. I'd be dead without him.

THE LIGHTS change back. The teakettle is whistling. DANNY turns the gas off. MAGGIE pushes the screen door open with her hips. She carries a potted plant. TOUS-SAINT jumps to aid her, puts the plant on the table.

DANNY

Where you're hiding the tea, grandma?

MAGGIE

In here.

(She places a teapot on the table, which has used teabags hanging in it)

Pour.

(He does. She closes the lid.)

You let it sit awhile. Let it steam.

(They all sit at the table. She fiddles with the plant).

This is for Janis. I did this up for Janis. She have some sunny place to put it? It likes full sun. A few hours of full sun.

DANNY

If you ever came out to see us, you'd know the apartment faces north. You better keep it. It'll probably die.

MAGGIE

I have a big batch. Maybe she'll find a place.

DANNY

It'll probably die.

TOUSSAINT

It's beautiful. What is it?

MAGGIE

A larkspur.

TOUSSAINT

(grinning)

The lady of larkspur lotion!

MAGGIE

I never had much luck with them until this year. It's from the delphinium family. It doesn't like acid soil. You boys come out take a look. This tall.

DANNY

Later, Maggie. We have to talk.

MAGGIE

I grew them from seeds. Up to here. I grow more things from seeds now. Snapdragons, too, all colors. They're easy. And tea, mint and Sweet Mary. Soon I won't have to buy none. I can drink my own.

(She turns the plant, pats down the earth.)

Pretty, the blue and white, huh? It's called *Frosted Sky*. My favorite is *Blue Mirror*, but I think Janis'll like this one. *Blue Mirror* is solid blue, a plain blue, what they call true blue, not purple, or lilac, or plumb, or lavender, or any of these in-between shades. There are a lot of purplish flowers, not too many plain blue. You boys seen the blue morning glory growing on the east wall? I did them from seeds too. And one of the lobelias I got from Nick at the corner last year is true blue. Now that one's called *Cambridge Blue*.

TOUSSAINT

You're a botanist, abuelita.

MAGGIE

I keep all the plastic names in a tin so I remember. I couldn't find the *Cambridge Blue* no more. I went all over looking for it, all the way down to the nursery on Ninety-sixth. Everybody has *Crystal Palace* and *Riviera Mix* and *Blue Splash* but no *Cambridge Blue*. I noticed it doesn't grow as well. It's not hardy.

Just like some people. The purple ones overtake it. That's why they don't sell it much. So I grew it from seed this year. It came up so dense, like a piece of sky fallen on the ground. Your mamma's favorite color. You have to grow it in the shade. Lobelia likes shade, not like the larkspur. The leaves stay green in the shade. In the sun they turn black.

TOUSSAINT

Maybe you should give Janis a lobelia then instead of the larkspur?

MAGGIE

Oh no, it needs to spread out. It doesn't look right in a small pot. It's too short. No, this is nice.

DANNY

(Has poured tea for everybody.)

Why don't you come home with me and help Janis pick a place for it.

MAGGIE

Not today son. I'm tired today.

DANNY

You always say that. I want you to see where we live, see the neighborhood. Look around. See how you like it. Out of the city, clean air, trees. Maybe we find you a place with a yard where you can have plants. Somewhere near us. If we work it right, we can sublet this place, make money off it. You could live rent free.

MAGGIE

I'm fine where I am.

DANNY

You are not fine. This is impossible. Six flights of stairs. Look at this place. There is nothing to eat.

MAGGIE

There's nothing to eat cause Alicia shops for me tonight after work, that's why there's nothing to eat right now. Cause Hassan is in the country with the Fresh Air Fund. I give him a dollar to keep for himself, and he shops for me a little every day. It's no problem. Only now he's on the farm with the Fund. And if I had known you were coming, I'd have gone to the store myself. The stairs are fine. I can climb the stairs. If I don't use my legs, soon I can't move at all. I have to walk. The stairs are good for me. It's good for me to move.

TOUSSAINT

I can run to the store right now. What do we want?

MAGGIE

Nothing. Alicia has the list. She has the money too. It's all taken care of. You don't worry about me.

TOUSSAINT

We do worry about you. Living alone like this. What if something happened to you?

MAGGIE

Nothing happens to me. Your brother calls me every night. I tell him I'm fine.
(This is news to Toussaint. He gives Danny a look.)

DANNY

All right, let's say you're staying for now. The point is, the building is being sold, it's being co-opt. And you can bet they'll want anybody out who can't afford to buy. They'll want you out period. Bob Green thinks the sale's gone through already. He's worried about his job.

TOUSSAINT

Bob Green! He still alive? He must be a hundred and ten. He still doing the supering?

DANNY

Yeah, for now he is. But a visiting super isn't going to be good enough for a co-op. Property values are soaring now that Clinton's put his office ...

MAGGIE

Don't you say no nothing bad about President Clinton. And you don't worry none about this co-op business neither. I have rights. I'm a senior citizen. I have been here too long. They cannot put me out.

DANNY

They can fucking shoot you like Eleanor Bumpers. They broke into her apartment and shot her dead, a handicapped old woman.

MAGGIE

Yes, I remember, that was almost 20 years ago. Your Grandpa was still alive. We were still down in 2B

DANNY

Twenty years, and nothing's changed. Diallo proved that. That poor immigrant. Where was he from, Guinea? Twenty-three-years old! Mistaken identity. Forty-one shots.

I'm sorry. The point is, we can't give them any excuse. We have to clean up the roof. We have to get rid of the plants. Listen to me, you pick out the ones you like best, the ones you want to keep, maybe four or five, a half dozen, your favorites, the blue ones. We'll arrange them for you any way you want. You'll see, it'll look great. You'll like it. But it has to be done now. You have to do it now. A friend of mine is coming by to ...

MAGGIE

(Gets up.)

You boys have to excuse me. She'll be coming around about now.

TOUSSAINT

Who's coming around?

MAGGIE

The dove.

DANNY

You told me at dusk.

(to Toussaint)

It's probably a pigeon.

MAGGIE

I know a pigeon from a dove.

(to Toussaint)

Ever see a brown pigeon with a crown? She is brown, a beautiful brown, with white markings on the wings. She has a crest, a little crest like a crown. She ain't no pigeon. She always lights in the honeysuckle and sits there and tilts her head and looks at me like she's telling me something, like she's bringing me a message.

(before Danny can say anything)

I know she isn't. It just looks that way.

TOUSSAINT

I'd like to see her, abuelita.

(MAGGIE goes out on the roof.)

DANNY

(grabs Toussaint's arm, stops him following her out.)

I hope to God she's not feeding it. That's all they need, one more reason. . .

TOUSSAINT

We can't take her plants. We *cannot* take her plants.

DANNY

We have to if we want to hang on to this place, and we would be stupid if we didn't. A friend of mine is willing to cart them away. At least some of them. God knows how we're

going to get them off the roof. These tubs weigh a ton. He's coming by to look them over. We can leave her a few, a few of the blue ones, the, the ... what are they called?

TOUSSAINT

Larkspur and lobelia. What about her honeysuckle and her roses and her herbs, her thousand herbs, and the few evergreens she's had forever? And her blue morning glory? And her tea! She loves them all. It's not right. She was here when the neighborhood was a war zone. It's her *garden*. It's not fair.

DANNY

Fair? Give me a break.

THE LIGHTS change. Fantastic shapes of leaves and blossoms dance all over the stage. A steel drum sounds from far away. The back wall dissolves. We see MAGGIE sitting in a frayed rattan chair among her plants. She squints as if into the sun, then turns to the audience.

MAGGIE

You may not believe this but it's true. One night in spring, it was raining hard, it was dark out already, and it was cold – it was in April I think, or March - she was flapping her wings and scratching with her claws against the window. I didn't know what it was. The blinds were closed. Like she was knocking. It was raining hard. It reminded me of that night before Bill's funeral. It was pouring then too, when I was convinced Mariel would magically appear at the funeral.

I put a cardboard box sideways and crumbs inside, and that's the only time I fed her. I'd seen her before. She come around visiting mornings and sit in the honeysuckle for a while, right there, next to my *Pink Fairy* tree.

I know she's come from Mariel but I don't know what she's saying. I don't know if she is telling me that Mariel is dead. I think I should know but I don't. I don't know. I think she went to Haiti to find that boy. That's what I think.

How can I leave here? What if she comes back, and I'm gone, and she wouldn't know if I was dead That's the worst, not knowing.

It's funny, I always see her as a little girl. She was fierce when she was little. And beautiful like you wouldn't believe. Such clear, dark eyes. And so impatient. ***"Now, mamma, now, I want it now!"*** One time – she couldn't have been more than three years old - when she cried and screamed over something and I said "Don't cry, Mariel," she stopped and looked straight at me and said ***"Oh let me. I want to."*** and she went right on screaming till she was done.

She was going to be a lawyer and put things right. Even after her boyfriend, that beautiful boy, was sent to that camp over in Jersey, she kept going to school. She was so full of life and hope and love – she loved him like he was a god. She didn't know that she was pregnant when they sent him back to Haiti. She gave the baby his name: Toussaint. It means all-saints. And she kept studying, got her degree from City College, for the baby's sake. She adored that child.

Cursed be I that did so! – All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,

(He becomes aware of DANNY watching him from the door.)

DANNY

(Drops his umbrella, a new portable fan, grocery bags, etc. to the floor and claps enthusiastically.)

Bravo!

(Holding up a bottle.)

I thought we'd have a little celebration. How does it feel to be in a hit? Way to go, bro! I can't believe this thing is moving to Broadway.

TOUSSAINT

This thing?

DANNY

(Taking a cake out of a carton.)

I didn't mean it like that. Sorry. It came out wrong. Anyway, who cares, you're going to be on Broadway. What you always wanted. You did it, you son-of-a-bitch. Unbelievable! Way to go! And you deserve it. Nobody deserves it more. God knows you've paid your dues. Did Maggie tell you? Ricky and Carlos were going to come see you and bring Bob Green. I don't think he's ever set foot in a legit theatre. Couldn't get tickets for love or money. I told them there is nothing you can do. They'll just have to wait till it reopens on Broadway. And then they won't be able to afford it. You can get them comps, right? You're entitled to comps on Broadway, right?

(He's been bustling about, putting things away, getting glasses and plates.)

Janis is sorry she hasn't been able to make it. She told me to be sure to tell you. But now that it's moving, she thought she might as well wait and see you on the big white way.

(He plugs the new fan in. It works.)

Voilà, Monsieur Toussaint! I've been working on the wiring. There's a lot more I need to fix while I'm oh I've been meaning to ask you

TOUSSAINT

Where is Maggie?

DANNY

... re you still shacking up with Irene? I mean, now that you're going to be in town for a while, you weren't thinking of staying here, were you?

TOUSSAINT

Do you want me to? Where's Maggie?

DANNY

She is helping Bob Green clear out the backyard. They're trying to make room for a few more plants. A Herculean labor, I'm afraid. Junk's been piling up there since the revolution. You should see the two of them tottering around down there. But you know Maggie, stubborn as a mule. One bit at a time, she keeps telling me. She's so proud of you.

TOUSSAINT

Have you told her yet?

DANNY

Told her what?

TOUSSAINT

That she's going to be a great-grandmother. – You haven't told her? Why not? You tell her I bet she'll move to Jersey in a minute. Help take care of the baby. You know she would.

DANNY

So you can have this place? Is that what you want? Is that what you're gunning for? Now that I'm getting it in shape you just show up here and expect it to be handed to you on a platter. Install yourself so you can buy at the insider's price, now that you're a big shot on Broadway. I work my butt off so I can crash here when I ...

TOUSSAINT

What the fuck are you talking about? I don't want this place. Even if I did have the down payment, which I don't, I would buy it for Maggie, not for me. I don't know what you're talking about?
You're staying here? You've been staying here? You leave your pregnant wife so you can take care of Maggie? Why? Grandma is fine. You leave a pregnant woman by herself? What's wrong with you?

DANNY

Janis is not by herself she's got her mother. My dear mother-in-law moved in weeks ago.

(There is a pause., TOUSSAINT is waiting for more.)

They don't need me. They just need my sperm and my salary.

(Another silence.)

We'll work it out. Janis wants some space, that's all. Just momentarily. It's probably hormones.

(Pause, exploding)

There is no way a baby of mine is growing up without his father. No way! A fulltime father! Fulltime parents. A mother. A mother, always, always a mother

(TOUSSAINT puts his arms around DANNY who is very upset.)

DANNY

(calms down, continues)

How could she leave? How could she abandon us? How can a mother leave her child?

TOUSSAINT

She was in pain, lost. We were alright. We had grandma and grandpa. Mom knew they would take care of us. We had each other.

DANNY

We were not alright. Nobody is alright without a mother, or with losing a daughter. It broke Maggie's heart. She is sitting on the roof out there talking to birds, waiting for Mariel to come home – even now, now, after all these years. She won't leave here. She won't leave this place. If she didn't then, after grandpa died when she couldn't afford to renew the lease.

To think she was able to convince Bernie Bernstein of all people to let us move up here into this shack.

TOUSSAINT

He likes Maggie, always had a soft spot for her, probably felt sorry for us. Or maybe he is a decent man, a business man with compassion. There are such people, you know. Anyway, he isn't going to be our landlord much longer.

DANNIE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean what I said earlier. Don't worry about me. Janis and I will work it out. We are working it out. It's just temporary! She needs some space, that's all. I've been staying here just now and then. I'm sorry, I'm a little on edge.

TOUSSAINT

A little?

DANNY

I got things on my mind.

TOUSSAINT

Don't we all.

DANNY

This co-op thing, and Janis, and her goddamn mother, and the baby coming. That's big, man. And on top of everything I was just handed another huge class. The classes are too big. Two years in the system and I'm burned out.

(Looks out on the roof. The rain has stopped. With a little laugh)

And the goddamn plants. And the goddamn 'other worldly' dove.

TOUSSAINT

You'll handle it. You'll work it out, Danny. You always do. You're smart Danny. You're up to it. You love teaching. You know you do. Your students adore you. They need you.

DANNY

At least you're a success. I'm sorry. Of course, you don't want this place. You can afford your own now. Who knows, movies may be next, Hollywood, the next Denzel!

TOUSSAINT

Wrong tint.

DANNY

What?

TOUSSAINT

So they tell me. Too hard to photograph. Nothing personal. What can I tell you, there's black and then there's black. Anyway, who cares? Who wants to play the scum of the earth? If you notice, Denzel didn't win for *Malcolm*. Now Hallie, here we have everybody's ideal of acceptable limits, cute little Caucasian nose, cheekbones, nice caramel color, gorgeous legs, and she can even act. Time to make an exception. Look how liberal we are!

DANNY

She won! An Oscar! That's all that matters. Boy, I didn't know you were this bitter.

TOUSSAINT

I'm not. I'm lucky I have something I can do that I love. I'm blessed.

DANNY

You bet your ass. Always were. And don't you forget it. Would you mind not mentioning the baby to Maggie just yet? I'm waiting for the right moment. She's got enough on her mind worrying about her *green* babies.

(They laugh. DANNY pours champagne.)

DANNY

Here's to Broadway!

TOUSSAINT

To babies – green and other shades!

(They drink, get seconds.)

To fatherhood!

DANNY

I should get her.

(he exits)

There is a change of LIGHT, various SOUND EFFECTS are used while he talks directly to the audience.

TOUSSAINT

I *am* lucky. It was harder on Danny. He was only seven when Momma disappeared. That's all he knows, her being gone - just gone one day – vanished. I was already into dance lessons and music and shit. I was busy. I remember sitting on the fire escape with her, her hard, skinny arms poking me, trying to teach me French. She smelled of coffee and soap. She loved sipping her take-out ice coffee, her one luxury, when we sat out there on hot days like today, shape-shifting. That's what we did, and that's what I still do. That's what acting is. You live someone else's troubles for a while. You slip into a body's skin and find his soul. Magic! Mamma taught me.

“You want to be the captain, or the captive in the belly of the boat? The pirate, or the bleached skeleton bones at the bottom of the sea?”

She taught me history that way. They say there was a trail of bones all the way from Afrika to St. John's from the ones who didn't survive the journey.

“Shall we be gulls on the wind, or travel down below in the cool waters? I'll be the mamma dolphin. You can ride piggyback.”

It was always the same trip between two islands, one called Manhattan and one, a kind of paradise, encrusted with coral, covered with enchanted forests, teeming with princes and monsters and fantastic creatures.

She wanted me to become a lawyer. I know I should care about causes, do my part, blaze trails, but let's face it, all I want to do is act. It makes me happy. It makes the audience happy. Emotion flowing back and forth between us.

(really connecting with the audience)

Can you feel it? You're my home, you're all the family I need.

One time I took a job on a cruise ship, first stop Haiti. I thought all I have to do is check the phonebook when I get there.

(Laughs at his naivety.)

It was one of those enormous ocean liners, sailing under a Nigerian flag, for tax reasons I believe, and to get around pollution laws. I was hired as a singing waiter. They had us in costumes, every night a different theme. Sombreros on Mexican night to go with the enchiladas, Lederhosen with the Sauerbraten on polka evening. Yep, I looked real sharp in those. Tails for formal dress dinner night with the captain. People never stopped eating.

The food could've sustained a third world nation for a year. Dinner in the Great Gatsby, formal lunches, casual lunches, snacks in the Windjammer Café, mammoth midnight buffets, time to set up for breakfast.

Our first stop I switched shifts with a Honduran so I could go ashore. The staff was truly international. For tax reasons I believe. A cruise photographer was snapping pictures of the passengers as they got off the boat at a beautifully carved sign. "*Welcome to Labadee Haiti.*"

It felt like a personal message to me when I stepped on terra firma. There was a stretch of sandy beach, palms, rocks, and beyond it, my enchanted forest rose lush and green, winding up the mountain till it melted into the indigo sky.

It turned out the beach was the exclusive property of the cruise line. They warned the passengers not to venture beyond the area. You could see huts of a village across the bay. There didn't seem to be any roads. A few *natives* hung around the deckchairs set up in neat rows, brushing off the sand, hoping for a tip. But the passengers had been told not to bring cash, had been told all they needed was their shipboard issued plastic card to pay for the banana boat rides, kayaking, snorkeling, the handicrafts sold at a huge in- and outdoor bazaar. I heard the desperate voices of the merchants, the poorest ones, the ones with the outdoor spaces, relentlessly pursuing the visitors, begging for a sale. And I saw the passengers return to their luxury cabins, loaded down with their bargain mahogany trays and salad bowls.

There was no time for me to make contact with anyone, let alone search for my phantom father. I was kept busy serving a picnic lunch under an arbor at the beach to the gay strains of a raggedy little local bongo band for island flavor.

Like I said, you, the audience, is all I need ...

There is a commotion outside. The LIGHTS change back.
MAGGIE enters huffing and puffing and falls into a chair.
DANNY is right behind her.

DANNY

Man, you should see what they did down there. Amazing! Now, if we only had a crane to hoist a few more of these babies off the roof.

MAGGIE

Hand me a glass of water, sweetie.

DANNY

We can do better than that. Champagne!

(Pours two glasses, hands her one, drains the other.)

To your new garden. Sweet times are a coming.

MAGGIE

I'm parched, son. I need some water first, before I start guzzling champagne.

DANNY

You can't toast with water. We have to toast Toussaint's success.

TOUSSAINT

(gives water to MAGGIE)

To your health, grandma. I love you!

DANNY

(starting to get tipsy)

Drink up, bro! Here's to Broadway! Here's to a great big fat Broadway salary!

TOUSSAINT

I'm not going to Broadway.

DANNY

Sure, you are!

TOUSSAINT

They want a name.

DANNY

They can't do that! - Can they do that?

(TOUSSAINT just looks at him.)

You'll be the understudy, right? It's still Broadway. It's still a union salary. You'll get to go on sometimes. It's still Broadway on your résumé. Like you said, a whole new ball-game. Like you said, you're in a different league now.

TOUSSAINT

They didn't offer me the understudy. Besides, I wouldn't want it.

DANNY

What are you talking about? You're crazy, man. What are you talking about? Of course, you want it.

TOUSSAINT

You want me to watch from the wings while some television dude butchers the part I created? I deserve the role. Somebody should understudy me. I want the berries, not just the water.

DANNY

You're crazy, man.

TOUSSAINT

Don't you worry about me. I'll get to Broadway. On my terms. When the time is right. I'll be playing leads, you just watch. Besides, I've already got something lined up.

DANNY

Like what?

TOUSSAINT

Like *Othello*. Another prison tour. The condensed version we did two years ago. I was terrific, I was fabulous, if I say so myself. And I'm going to be even better this time. I learned so much working with George ...

DANNY

I'm sure the inmates will appreciate your art. Shakespeare in prison, don't make me laugh.

TOUSSAINT

You'd be surprised.

DANNY

A captive audience, huh?

TOUSSAINT

Best audience I ever had. Once you earn their attention, the brothers are with you every step of the way.

DANNY

I bet! I can just guess what part they like best.
(He makes a gesture of strangling.)

TOUSSAINT

You've got it.

DANNY

This is so stupid, **stupid!** You're throwing your career down the drain. You're throwing away the best opportunity you ever had. Take it to the Union; don't just

TOUSSAINT

The understudy is taken; somebody owed somebody a favor...

MAGGIE

You two stop it. It's his decision, Danny. He'll do what's right for him. Now, isn't anybody going to cut me a piece of this gorgeous cake?

DANNY

Sure, grandma, let's celebrate! Why not? Here's to my brother's prison tour. At least he's not an inmate. That's grounds for celebration.

(He drinks, gets a knife, sees the envelope on the counter.)

There is a letter for you, grandma.

(Hands it to her.)

MAGGIE

You read it, son.

(DANNY opens the envelope, reads silently)

DANNY

I must be hallucinating. A bit too much of the bubbly.

(hands the letter to TOUSSAINT)

TOUSSAINT

This can't be true. I must be hallucinating.

MAGGIE

What is it, son?

TOUSSAINT

You're being evicted. According to the housing authority non-elevator buildings can have only five floors. According to the housing authority this apartment does not exist.

(He laughs.)

It must be a figment of our imagination.

DANNY

Perhaps we don't exist either.

TOUSSAINT

Perhaps we shall melt into air, into thin air.

(He cuts cake for everyone, refills the glasses.)

Here's to illusions! Don't you worry, abuelita, we have resources. They have to pay me four weeks salary – equity rules – four weeks salary for doing absolutely nothing.

DANNY

Are you sure about that?

TOUSSAINT

Yes, we're under a production agreement. They have to give me the part or buy me out: four weeks salary. I doubt it will run much longer than that. Sure, there is a lot of press right now, a lot of hullabaloo, but the audiences won't come. Shakespeare on Broadway!

(He raises his glass, empties it, refills everybody's.)

Here is to good old Will.

(Toussaint starts to grin)

Let's not first kill all the lawyers, let's sue first. We'll sue!

DANNY

(picking up on his exhilaration)

Yes, we'll sue

TOUSSAINT

.... for misrepresentation of reality.

DANNY

We'll squat. We'll barricade ourselves.

MAGGIE

(laughing)

We'll put a hex on them.

DANNY

We'll get Sharpton to stage a demonstration.

TOUSSAINT

We'll move to the South Seas.

MAGGIE

We'll move to South Jersey, that's where we'll move. To welcome the baby.

(They stare at her.)

The dove told me.

DANNY

You're going to be a great-grandmother, Maggie. Your first great-grandchild. If it's a girl, Janis and I would like to name her Mariel. What do you think?

MAGGIE

*(Looks back and forth at her grandsons, tears in her eyes;
something arrests her attention)*

Look! Look!

*(She points to the open roof door. The sun is setting. The dove
has lighted on a plant. They all become silent and stare.*

TOUSSAINT

We are such stuff as dreams are made on.

C U R T A I N

end of play