

***Detroit '67***

A Play

By Dominique Morisseau

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## CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

### ***Detroit 67***

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CHELLE (MICHELLE)-	Black woman, late 30's, strong, steadfast, firm, and not easily impressed. A widow, mother, and sister. A loving heart beneath her pride.
LANK (LANGSTON)-	Black man, early 30's, cool, loving, and charismatic. A dreamer. Has a special affect on women – but not a womanizer. Chelle's younger brother.
BUNNY (BONITA)-	Black woman, mid-late 30's, fun, spunky, sexy, and joyful. A friend and sometimes a lover... Never lets nothin' get her down.
SLY (SYLVESTER)-	Black man, late 30's, hip, slick, and sweet-talking. An honest hustler and numbers man. Fiercely loyal. Lank's best buddy.
CAROLINE-	White woman, late 20's/early 30's, beautiful, quiet strength, troubled, soft, and mysterious. There is a world of danger behind her eyes.

SETTING: Detroit, Michigan. July 1967.

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Act One. Scene One.

Lights up on the basement of a two-story home. It is an un-finished basement, but efforts have been made to make it look inviting. A little balcony with stairs spills from upstage right. A board, some cabinets and a couple of stools makeshift a bar.

Pictures of Motown artists adorn the walls. Proud posters of Joe Louis and Muhammed Ali. Somewhere else- a photo of Malcolm X. Big tack through Malcolm's forehead.

A big old freezer leans against the upstage left wall. Somewhere- a washer and dryer and sink. A few clothes hang on a line.

A string of Christmas lights lay on an old shabby couch, which sits in the middle of the floor. Next to it, an old recliner. Crates covered by cloth make a coffee table. A couple of pipe poles stand as pillars on both sides of the space. Height markings are somewhere on the wall. A name in cursive. A drawing of a huge four-pointed star. A huge Black fist. A very bad and lumpy portrait of a Brown girl.

Behind the couch against the wall is an old record player. It plays the Temptations "Ain't Too Proud To Beg".

CHELLE sings along as she works to untangle the Christmas lights. Suddenly the record skips.

CHELLE

Dang it!

She hurries to the record player and moves the needle past the skip. Goes back to singing. It skips again.

CHELLE

Not this part... come on!

She goes to fix it again.

CHELLE

(to the record player)

You gonna behave now?

Waits. Watches it. It seems cool. She goes back to untangling the lights. The record player skips again.

CHELLE

Dang it! (she plays with the needle) You got something against David Ruffin? Hunh? What's the matter? (She waits for an answer from the player) Ohh... you wanted to see him in concert? Honey, me too. I was mad he didn't show up. He can sing you outta your drawls, you let'im. But that's no reason to mess David all up right now. He ain't a bad man. Just a little troubled, maybe. But troubled don't make you bad. Can't nobody sang like him... Hell, can't nobody sang like none of the Temptations. They all got voices of honey you ask me. So don't go scratchin' up on David just cuz you mad. You let David play.

She puts the needle back on the record. It behaves.

CHELLE

That's better. Got us a party happenin' this weekend, and I need you to act right. Alright now?

Somehow, the player agrees. Be imaginative.

Chelle continues untangling the lights. It's creating much displeasure.

CHELLE

Lawd... come on thangs! (she tangles them more) Dang it!

A colorful knock at the top of the stairs.

BUNNY (o.s.)

Hey hey hey! You want some comp-naay?

CHELLE

I'm down here Bunny! Come on in...

A firecracker of a woman, BUNNY, comes on down the steps. It is an art for her. She wears a one-piece jumpsuit, bangles everywhere, and the highest of high-heeled shoes. Face fully beat with fake lashes n' all. Middle of the day? No matter.

BUNNY

What's happenin' mama? Heard ya'll was fixin' up for a party this weekend. Movin' the party to ya folks place, hunh?

CHELLE

Tryin' to.

BUNNY

Ya'll been quiet for a few weeks since ya'll took the party outta Lank's old crib.

CHELLE

Took us a minute to get him settled back over here, that's all. Now that Daddy done joined Mama up that stairway to heaven, we figure it make more since for him to move back in.

BUNNY

Well the folks been askin' me where to go. I been sendin' 'em over to the Dukes- hate to say.

CHELLE

You ain't!

BUNNY

I had to Chelle! Now you know I love you like potato salad, but folks pay me to send 'em to the happenin' places. They want an after-hours joint, I gotta send 'em somewhere. With ya'll off the scene, Dukes done tightened it up. Even got that new hi-five record player.

CHELLE

You mean hi-fi?

BUNNY

Whatever.

CHELLE

We just had to finish squarin' up this business with Mama and Daddy's money. Took a lil' minute. Them lawyers'll try to trick you out of your own inheritance, I swear.

BUNNY

I told ya'll to talk to my man Stubby. He woulda gave ya'll a good price.

CHELLE

I told you I didn't want no lawyer named Stubby. Sounds short and fat and unprofessional.

BUNNY

Fine then. You go'on over to Hamtramack and get you one of them Steinbergs or them Zielinskis – or how you say it. See if they don't charge you both your arms and your legs. And probably your mama's legs too.

CHELLE

Not Mr. Furman. We got us a deal. I told him to work with me on these legal fees and come time for him to need a car, I got Sly on the job. Get him somethin' for a real good deal. He seem to like them odds. So he took care of us just fine.

BUNNY

You say so. (beat) You having Christmas in July?

CHELLE

Naw, girl. Help me with this string, will you? I'm trying to untangle this mess so we have some kinda decorations. Lank supposed to be out getting us some more bulbs for 'em, cuz half of 'em done burned out. Had these since we was little ones. Everytime I leave Lank in charge of wrapping 'em, this is what I end up with. Tangled mess.

Bunny helps Chelle untangle the lights.

BUNNY

That brother of yours shoul' got his own way of doing things, don't he?

CHELLE

You can say that again.

BUNNY

What ya'll gonna spend your folk's money on? A new car? Some baad threads?

CHELLE

Julius' college tuition is all I care about. You know that much. Use the inheritance for that, and pay off this house note with the parties. That's all I need.

BUNNY

Oooo girl, if I had me any kind of inheritance, I'd see the world. Tellin' you, I'd be in Rome and Paris and all them high n' mighty places with my mink coat and my painted nails and my tea and crumpets – or whatever them folks be havin'. I wanna be just like them White gals we be seein' at the picture show. Sittin' back on one of them satin sofas, fannin' myself and readin' magazines til' my man come back home from makin' his thousands to scoop me up and lay me right.

CHELLE

(laughing)

You always lookin' for somebody to lay you right!

BUNNY

That's right, honey. 'Cept these niggers 'round here ain't bringing back no kinda thousands. Hell, they ain't even bringin' back no hundreds. 'Less them fools done hit the numbers and picked up a big ol' stack from Sly, only thing they comin' to lay is they hair to the side with that conkaline!

CHELLE

You a mess!

BUNNY

That's why I got to do for myself, now. Keep my ear to the ground and tell folks where to get things. Go here for the best hairdo in the city. Go there if you need a new auto part. Go up if you want some good blow. Go down if you want some good bump. Go to the side if you want some down home cookin'. Go crooked if you wanna shoot the dice. Go left if you want the cheapest threads. Go right if you want the finest wine. And go to Twelfth Street if you wanna partaaaaay.... And if you ain't lookin' for none of that, then what the hell you doin' in Detroit?

CHELLE

You just better be tellin' folks to come on through to 1568 Clarimount from now on cuz the Poindexter parties are back in the neighborhood!

BUNNY

Well alright. We been missin' ya'll parties.

CHELLE

These parties gon' be better than the rest. I gave Lank some money to go'on out and pick up some new .45's.

BUNNY

Ooooh... who you gon' get? I hope he pickin' up some more Temptations.

CHELLE

You know we got the Temps.

BUNNY

And some of that Marvin Gaye? Cuz I can work my best hip roll to his voice. It just go together the best. Like his voice got some kinda magnetic pull and my hips got the charge.

CHELLE

Got Marvin. And Martha and the Vandellas. And I still got the Miracles. I'm gon' put on a good one for you right now.

Chelle rushes over to the record player and sets up her .45. The Miracles, "Shop Around" plays.

BUNNY

I love me some of the Miracles, too. That Smokey'll make you throw ya drawls on stage. I wanna hit him smack in the face with mine, I ever get the chance.

CHELLE

You so nasty, Bunny.

BUNNY

That's why they call me Bunny, baby.

The record suddenly skips. Deflation.

CHELLE

Dang it!

BUNNY

Awww nawww nawww.... That ain't never gonna do....

Chelle rushes over to fix the record.

A Slam upstairs. Moments later, LANK enters the basement, carrying a box of goods down the stairs.

LANK

Bring that next one down here, Sly!

SLY  
(o.s.)

Behind ya in a sec! Gotta turn off the truck!



Lank drops the boxes in the middle of the floor.

CHELLE

You got the stuff!

Chelle rushes over to the box to look through the goods.

BUNNY

Hey there, daddy.

LANK

Miss Bonita- Bunny herself. Lay some on me, mama.

Bunny plants a sultry kiss on Lank's cheek. He taps her on the bottom. Chelle pulls out some posters. A velvet painting. A neon light that says "OPEN". Some pathetic party favors.

CHELLE

Where's the bulbs for the lights?

LANK  
(vague)

They in there.

BUNNY

You gon' save me a dance this Friday, sugar?

LANK

I got my slowest one saved for you, Bunny girl.

BUNNY

I done told the folks ya'll startin' things 'round midnight. That way they don't have to wait for the clubs to close if they don't want to. Ya'll can get the jump on folks.

CHELLE

(head in box- displeased)

Yeah, cuz Bunny been sending folks over to the Dukes these days.

LANK

You ain't!

BUNNY

Just til' ya'll ready to come back out right.

LANK

Oh we ready, baby. We ready. You gon' see in one second.

CHELLE

(in the box)

These all the bulbs? This itty bitty pack? This ain't enough for the whole string. And what's with this tacky lookin' neon sign? Where's this thing supposed to go?

LANK

They was... throwin' that away down at Roscoe's Liquor Store. Got a nice color to it. Thought we could use it for somethin'...

CHELLE

Color! We have plenty of color with my Christmas lights.

LANK

Awww Chelle, don't start wrinkling your forehead, now. I got plans that's gonna make our parties outta sight!

CHELLE

Where's the drink coasters I asked you to get? I don't see them in here nowhere.

Another Door Slam upstairs.

CHELLE

And tell Sylvester to Stop Slammin' My Doors!

SLY enters the basement carrying another box.

SLY

Hey hey there sweet Chelle. What's happenin' Bunny?

BUNNY

Hey Sly.

Chelle rushes over and goes through the box before Sly can finish setting it down.

SLY

Whoa... peddle and ease there, mama.

CHELLE

I better find my coasters in here.

LANK

You gon' find somethin' better than them coasters.

SLY

That's right, alright...

Sly looks at Lank inquisitively. Lank shakes his head "no". Chelle pulls out an 8-track cassette. She looks at it strangely.

CHELLE

What the hell is this?

BUNNY

Oooo, I seen one of them before. They got 'em down at Lucky's.

CHELLE

Where're my .45's? You supposed to be gettin' that lil' Stevie Wonder. That Junior Walker everybody talkin' about. The Elgins. The Four Tops.

LANK

I told you not to sweat it, sis. I got it taken care of. Come on Sly. Let's bring it down.

SLY

You got it man.

Sly and Lank head up the basement stairs.

CHELLE

Bring what down? You better be bringin' down my .45's. I gave enough money for all the songs on my list.

BUNNY

Somethin' tells me they ain't givin' two shifts 'bout your list.

At the top of the stairs behind the door, Sly and Lank begin maneuvering with something.

LANK

(O.S.)

Pick it up with that hand.

SLY

(o.s.)

Nah nah nah... I need to hold this part with that hand. You grab this part.

LANK

(o.s.)

Naw man! That don't make sense. I need to hold this part right here.

SLY

(o.s.)

Cool man, I got it. Just grab that one.

LANK

(o.s.)

I got it. Just don't drop that thing. Cost us a fortune.

SLY

(o.s.)

I got it, man. I got it. Just go'on...

Seconds later, Sly and Lank emerge onto the balcony carrying speakers and a music system.

CHELLE

That don't look like no .45!

LANK

This here's somethin' better than them .45's. This here's an 8-track player.

BUNNY

That's right! That's what it's called. Seen a commercial for it on t.v. while back.

CHELLE

Langston Hughes Poindexter! Tell me this ain't how you done spent all that money I gave you.

LANK

Now cool out for a minute Chelle. Just listen. This here's gonna be the answer to all our problems. Tell her Sly.

CHELLE

Naw Sly, don't tell me.

SLY

It's true, Chelle. The 8-track player supposed to be better than a record player. You can get one in your car. You can move this thing around with you. And they say- you play some of that Smokey on this thing- his voice sound more velvet than it do right now.

BUNNY  
(intrigued)

They say that?

SLY

That's what they say, now.

CHELLE

Hmph- don't look like much to me.

LANK

Is you crazy? Look at this thing, Chelle. Ain't it beautiful? Even light up when the song play.

CHELLE

It's ugly. And weird. Look too technical. My record player plays and you can hear the needle movin' through the song. The way it dance up against the vinyl real close... that's what I like. Not no 8-track.

LANK

Give it a chance Chelle. I'ma set this up with Sly and then we gonna play you somethin' on it. You'll see. It sounds much better than that ol' record player.

CHELLE  
(faint)

Daddy gave me that record player.

LANK

Won't be no scratchin' on a 8-track. Song play all the way through – smooth.

BUNNY

Now that sound like somethin' you need.

LANK

Dukes ain't got nothin' like this. We'll shut them down so quick, folks'll be like - Dukes who?

SLY

It's true Chelle. Right now, Dukes ranked number one for after hours joints in Detroit. But you tell folks you got somethin' new to listen to that Motown on, they gonna be pushin' to get through. Believe it, woman.

CHELLE

How much it cost?

LANK

Money ain't no object when it comes to quality. Tell her Sly.

CHELLE

Naw Sly- don't tell me nothin'! You done spent it all, didn't you? All the shoppin' money I gave you- gone, ain't it?

LANK

You see this quality?

SLY

Top of the line quality.

BUNNY

Look like a fine quality to me.

CHELLE

Well I guess it ain't nothin' left to say since the amen corner done spoke. Forget my lil' record player then. I keep it to myself....

Chelle moves away and goes through the boxes. Sly looks at Lank and motions for him to tell Chelle something. Lank mouths "NOT YET". Chelle is oblivious. Bunny notices, but merely shakes her head and says nothing.

BUNNY

Ya'll stand to make a killin' this month offa these parties. Folks been hittin' the after hours joints more since some of the vets done come back home from 'Nam.

LANK

Heard Otis Jones done come back home. Say he been talkin' to himself sometimes on the street.

CHELLE

Poor Otis.

SLY

That's why folks need a good place to get a drink and have a good time and leave that Vietnam blues back over seas.

CHELLE

Don't say it that way, Sylvester.

SLY

I'm just sayin' what it is.

CHELLE

Just don't say it that way. Make it sound like we doin' more than we are. We just trying to make a lil' money the way we know how.

LANK

Sly know that Chelle.

SLY

We all know it Chelle.

CHELLE

That's all. Not tryin' to mess these vets up more than they been already.

LANK

Ain't nobody messin' nobody up. We here to make people feel good. Make some extra money to keep my nephew in that Tuskegee Institute. I told Julius – he gonna be like one of them airmen. That's what he promised me.

SLY

A young Colored brother from Detroit in school down there in Tuskegee... that's somethin' to make folk feel real good. I'll drink to that one myself- hell...

BUNNY

He gon' study all through the summer too?

CHELLE

Say he wanted to stay down there and work during the summer. (beat) I think it's a girl.

LANK

That's my nephew.

BUNNY

Just like his uncle.

LANK

Watch your mouth there, woman.

SLY

You, uh...you gon' be needin' some real money to keep him down there, ain't you?

CHELLE

With these parties... we should be alright. Keep Julius down there til' he graduate. My boy is gonna go all the way.

Sly looks at Lank again. Lank finally nods and mouths "BE SMOOTH". Sly adheres.

SLY

Say there...uh... Lank...you know Sheplings Bar on Twelfth Street gettin' sold?

LANK

(feigning surprise)

That right? Old man sellin' it?

SLY

(feigning casual)

Yeah, that's right. Movin' to the suburbs. Peanut said White folks all over town been tryin' to sell they property and move on out.

Bunny senses they're up to something and watches with amusement.

LANK

Tryin' to get away from all these niggers movin' in, hunh?

BUNNY

Well where they goin'? Cuz if it's nice, I got news for 'em. Niggers gon' find it.

LANK

Niggers deserve nice stuff too. Hey Sly...how much he sellin' for?

SLY

Say he takin' bids. Folks that can come up with five grand can get in on the bid.

LANK

(overly surprised)

Five grand? That's it? (beat) But what about the license? That's what run your well dry.

SLY

Say he gonna sell the license too. Bid on the table is 15 grand- license included.

LANK

(overly excited)

License included?!? What's he playin' at?



SLY

Peanut say he talkin' straight.

LANK

Straight away? Fifteen grand? Whoo...that's somethin'!

Lank looks at Chelle.

LANK (cont'd)

Ain't that somethin' Chelle?

CHELLE

(nonchalantly)

I guess so... for somebody who want it. (beat) Not me.

LANK

Well you know Sly...me and Chelle got that much to put in if that's what he's playin' with.

CHELLE

Oh no we don't.

LANK

Sure we do. Say Sly...we got that much from the stash Daddy left us.

SLY

Say what? Ain't that a coincidence? I was just sayin' what I was sayin' without knowin' nothin' bout that.... That's funny....

Lank looks at Chelle. She stops rummaging through things and studies him close.

CHELLE

What the hell's goin' on?

BUNNY

Some funny shit, fa sho...

LANK

Nothin' funny. Just thinkin' 'bout this bar Sly done brought up. That's all.

CHELLE

Sly done brought up....hunh.... What you got up your sleeve?

LANK

Why you always think somethin's up my sleeve Chelle?

CHELLE

Cuz when it come to you and Sly, it always is. (beat) This 8-track machine ain't just for no basement party, is it? Ya'll done bought all this stuff for some kinda scheme!

LANK

Awww Chelle... (beat) Okay, loooka here... Me and Sly... We been thinkin' 'bout how it'd feel to be legit. Thinkin'... we could get us a piece of Shep's bar and start to build somethin' for ourselves. Found this stuff for a good deal – thought it'd be great for a bar!

CHELLE

So that's why you done changed all the decorations? For some bar?!

LANK

Not just some bar. A bar of our own.

CHELLE

No Lank.

LANK

Whoa there- think about it for a sec, Chelle.

CHELLE

Nothin' to think about. I just say no.

LANK

Now hold on just a minute. It'd be somethin' to be legit. Wouldn't it Sly?

SLY

Do better than dodgin' these pigs every second. They been cracking down on the after hours spots, y'know. Trying to catch everybody operating without a license. Get us for throwin' dice or smoking a joint---whatever they can. Dukes almost got raided couple weeks ago, but Peanut came in and told us the Big Four was 'round the corner. Niggers was runnin' this way and that 'fore they could shut everything down.

BUNNY

That Big Four been serious 'round Twelfth Street too.

SLY

When it's time to clean up the city, the ghetto be the only place they come lookin' for trash...

LANK

I'm tired a bein' treated like trash. Four pigs rollin' together to pick out niggers one by one. I can think of a whole lot more need to be cleaned up on these streets than us.

BUNNY

Wish they'd clean up them pot-holes on Grand Boulevard. Damn near flipped my car last week- whole was so wide.

SLY

They wanna clean somethin', why don't they clean up them pigs that come down here droppin' that dope off on the corner? I seen 'em talkin' to Otis a few times. I know what kinda game they playin'...

LANK

Pickin' out niggers ain't gonna do nothin' but lock away a whole lotta potential. Put us to good use, this city be full of all kinds of production. I'm tired of bein' laid off at that plant and runnin' joints outta my basement like I got somethin' to hide. Like the only way I can be somethin' is underground. I'm ready to be above ground just like them White folks. Ain't no tellin' what Detroit could be if we was all put to good use. We could make some kinda ... what's that word when things is all copesthetic and beautiful? Like perfect, damn near?

SLY

Utopia.

LANK

Utopia. Detroit could be some kinda... what's that place Malcolm went? Side by side with them other.. y'know... Muhammed folks?

SLY

Mecca.

LANK

Detroit could be some kinda Mecca... that's what it could be. Colored folks moving this city forward. Get us some business of our own – make them stop treatin' us like trash to be swept away. I'm tellin' you, we get a chance to get above ground, Detroit'll be a Mecca.

BUNNY

Honey, if you can make Detroit that kinda place, I'll marry you.

LANK

You better go'on and pick out your dress then, baby.

CHELLE

And you better come on and help me finish gettin' this place ready. We need this joint jumpin' by Friday. Let them Dukes know the Poindexters are back on the spot.

BUNNY

Midnight good?

CHELLE

That's good to me.

LANK  
(to Sly- aside)

You gettin' in on that bid fa sho?

SLY

Like I told you- I'm gon' try. My number hit the other day, so I got me half. If you could pull the other half...then that'd be somethin'.

LANK  
(hushed)

Lemme talk to her.

SLY

You said it, my man.

BUNNY

See ya'll good folks later. Got to catch up with my ol' man.

LANK

Awww, don't tell me that- now. You breakin' my heart baby.

BUNNY

Don't worry honey. There's plenty of Bunny to go 'round.

With a luxurious twirl, Bunny heads up the stairs and out of the basement.

SLY

I'ma go'on too. But I'll catch you at Lucky's Lank. See you soon, sweet Chelle.

CHELLE

Goodbye, Sylvester.

LANK

Later Sly.

Sly exits up the stairs. Chelle goes through the box. She pulls out 8-track cassettes with disapproval.

LANK

There you go. That's that Mary Wells you been wanting.

CHELLE  
(firmly)

On .45.

LANK

You gon' like this better. Trust me.

Lank starts to set up the 8-track player.

LANK

Listen here, Chelle. This bid on the bar... this ain't a bad thing, y'know.

CHELLE

No Lank.

LANK

Now just hear me out, will you? I got enough friends over here to make this spot happenin'. We won't be wall to wall up in here. Got space for more folks. Won't be competing with them Dukes no more. Our own spot- that'd be somethin'.

CHELLE

That ain't the somethin' I want, Lank. Put Mama and Daddy's hard earned money on the line just to keep hustlin? Cuz that's all a bar is. A hustle on-the-books.

LANK

That's all any kinda business is.

CHELLE

I don't wanna be hustlin' forever.

LANK

What you wanna do, Chelle? Sit on the money til' we rot?

CHELLE

I just wanna have somewhere for Julius to return and call home. These parties are temporary. Survivin'. This house and this life is all I need. I don't wanna take on nothin' that could make us lose it.

LANK

Don't you see I'm tryin' to make things better? Invest this money so it grow into somethin' more. For you and Julius. Be the man for him that his Daddy woulda been – was he alive.

CHELLE

I know, Lank. You been a good fill-in for my Willie and I love you for it. But I don't love no bar. I don't wanna lose my son's future to no bar. Too shaky. I want him to have something solid.

LANK

Me too.

CHELLE

Then promise me you won't blow our money on this deal.

LANK

Come on Chelle.

CHELLE

Promise me we gonna hold this house and this family together. Promise me that, Lank

LANK

Alright, Chelle. Nevermind the bar.

Beat.

CHELLE

I'm gon' go up to the corner store and get us some liquor for the shelf. Where the keys?

LANK

Upstairs on the counter.

CHELLE

Be back in a few. (beat) I'm gon' see 'bout this Mary Wells when I get back. Bet it ain't better than my .45.

Chelle heads up the basement stairs. Lank, alone, goes to his 8-track player and plugs it in.

He picks up a cassette and smiles.

LANK

(to the cassette)

We'll show her, Mary...

Mary Wells, "What's Easy For Two Is So Hard For One" plays.

Lights fade on Lank and his 8-track.

## Act One. Scene Two.

Night falls on the house. The basement is dark and still. Suddenly, the door cracks open. A peek of moonlight from the balcony.

Shuffled footsteps come down the steps... followed by muffled voices.

SLY  
Where to? Not there – wait- to the left  
some- on my foot now- goddamnit-  
nigger my foot!

LANK  
Over here. Right there- okay- hold on-  
what's that – who's foot is that? – move  
over more!

LANK  
Put her on the couch.

Lank and Sly carry a large covered figure  
over to the couch and plop it down.

Lank goes over to the light and flicks on a  
lamp.

Sly stands over the unknown figure and  
stares.

SLY  
She's still out.

LANK  
Check her pulse?

SLY  
Don't need to. She's breathing. I can see that much. She's breathing.

LANK  
Thank God.

Lank walks over to the concealed figure and  
pulls back her cover. For the first time, we  
see CAROLINE, a young White woman,  
who lay motionless.

SLY

Say Lank, I'm gonna need a joint for this one.

LANK

You know Chelle don't like smoking in the house.

SLY

I think I'ma need a pass on this one.

LANK

How 'bout a drink instead? Some gin in the cabinet.

SLY

I'm already over my limit....but.....what the hell...

Sly goes to the bar and fixes himself a drink.

LANK

She bleeding anywhere?

SLY

Don't think so.

LANK

Gotta make sure.

Lank moves around Caroline carefully. He touches her lightly. She stay motionless.

Sly gulps his drink.

SLY

She knocked out cold.

LANK

You said it.

SLY

Maybe she might need some kinda ice pack or somethin' for her head. Right there in the corner. Look like some dried blood.

LANK

Yeah... yeah... I think we got that...

Lank goes over to the freezer and pulls out a box of frozen veggies. He brings it back and starts to set it on Caroline's forehead.



LANK

Mess found us. What else could we do?

SLY

I go listenin' to you... that's my problem. Shoulda left her out there and kept rollin'.

LANK

You listenin' to me? I couldn't tell...

SLY

Yeah nigger, I'm listenin' to you. You the one think you some kinda Negro Messiah. Everytime I turn around, you tryin' to part some seas or walk on water or some shit. How I get into it--- Where I fit in this mess---I don't know. How I let you make me bring this white girl back here, I don't know! I must be drunker than I thought.

LANK

Awww man, I ain't make you do nothin'. A man can't make no other man do nothin' - he a real man. You got hands and feet ain't you? Drove the truck here, ain't you? You in this just as much as me.

SLY

How am I in this as much as you? I ain't the one grab her!

LANK

No- you the one sat there til' somebody tell you what to do.

SLY

Tell me what to do?! I got feet and hands ain't I?

LANK

I ain't so sure.

SLY

Ain't nobody tell me what to do. *I* tell me what to do.

LANK

Well okay then, you said it.

SLY

Say what?

LANK

You did this cuz of you. Not cuz of me. Just like you said.

Beat.

SLY

Nigger don't be tryin' to slick talk me when I been drinkin'!

A door creak at the top of the stairs. Chelle enters the balcony... sleepily.

CHELLE

Lank? Sly? Ya'll alright down there? I heard ya'll comin' in... woke me up....

LANK

We alright Chelle. Go'on back to bed. We alright.

Chelle catches a glance at the couch. She sees someone sprawled out over it.

CHELLE

Who's that....what's goin' on down there? Can't none of ya'll drunk friends sleep here tonight...

LANK

It's nothin' Chelle- go'on back to bed now.

Chelle peers more over the balcony. She comes down the steps.

CHELLE

Lank- I don't want none of your women over here tonight neither. We done talked about this-

Chelle stops. Sees Caroline- passed out.

CHELLE

What the...hell?

LANK

Chelle, relax now.

CHELLE

Relax- my ass!

SLY

Hold on a minute Chelle.

CHELLE

Hold on- nothin'!

SLY

Whoa- hold on there. You might wanna cover it with somethin' first. She get freezer burn or somethin'. Have a pack of vegetables stuck to her face.

LANK

Wouldn't want that...

SLY

There go a towel over there.

Sly points to the sink basin.

LANK

Right.

Lank rushes over to get the towel. He wraps the veggies and comes back over to Caroline. He sets it on her face. She flinches but doesn't awaken.

LANK

It's alright, miss. It's okay...

Lank lifts the box.

LANK

Maybe I should leave her be.

SLY

Maybe. (beat) What you gon' tell Chelle?

LANK

The truth. Ain't nothin' else to tell her.

SLY

The truth? Hell.....I'd like to know the truth myself. Truth ain't comin' til that woman wake back up.

LANK

I pray to God she wake back up.

SLY

We must be two of the craziest niggers in Detroit right now – get ourselves involved in this mess.

LANK

Gimme a chance to explain.

CHELLE

You better start explaining real good. What the hell is this white girl doin' down here? You done went stupid?

LANK

Hold on Chelle! It's not what you thinkin'-

CHELLE

Well tell me what it is then! Cuz I'm thinkin' you and Sly done lost ya'll everlasting minds! Bringing this girl at this hour-

SLY

We got a reason for that, Chelle.

CHELLE

I ain't hearin' no reasons! Somebody better tell me what's what.

LANK

We found her, Chelle.

CHELLE

Found her how? Where was you lookin' for her at?

SLY

Wasn't lookin' for her. Just found her when we was leavin' Lucky's Place. Stumbling on the side of the road and lookin' real bad.

CHELLE

What make you pick her up and bring her here?!

LANK

She been hurt up. Somebody done hurt her up good.

Chelle goes over to Caroline quickly. She pulls back the covers and sees even more bruises along Caroline's face. Swollen eye. Dried blood by her temple. Greens and yellows staining her face.

CHELLE

(gasps) Good Lord. She look terrible.

SLY

Did a good number on her, whoever they is.

CHELLE

(leaning to Caroline's chest)

She breathing. Thank God. (beat) Ya'll didn't... ya'll ain't messed with her-

LANK

Come on, Chelle.

CHELLE

Just have to ask. (beat) What happened to her?

LANK

Caught a glimpse of her when we was leaving Lucky's. Stumbling 'round on Chicago Boulevard. Lookin' like she might fall right into traffic.

CHELLE

Lord...she probably done got robbed. What was she doin' on Chicago?

SLY

Thought maybe she was drunk and done forgot where she was. I seen that a few times.

LANK

Slowed down to ask if she was ok. That's when we saw her up close. Lookin' in bad way and not really all there. Mumbling somethin' to herself. Not really makin' a lot of sense. I leaned out to ask her if she needed a ride and that's when she looked at me... dead in my eye – in this way like... like she knew exactly where was she was for a second. Like she heard me for the first time. And she said "get me outta here." Real serious- like that. Dead in my eye. Then she got faint, like she was gonna drop right where she stood. I jump out to grab hold of her...helped her into the truck to drop her off somewhere, and she just pass right out. Couldn't get her back up.

SLY

So this...this nigger say-

LANK

Say to Sly, we better bring her back here. We leave her down there, whoever done this may be comin' back to finish the job.

CHELLE

Her face – sweet Jesus. It look like it's been somebody's punching bag.

LANK

Way she looked at me...dead in my eye like that...(beat) I dunno....just messed with me.... Had to do somethin'.

CHELLE

You get her some ice?

SLY

Took a pack of vegetables in the freezer.

CHELLE

She gonna need some ointment for this gash. Sly run up in the bathroom and get me some ointment out the cabinet.

SLY

Whatever you say.

Sly wobbles upstairs.

CHELLE

So where we gonna take her?

LANK

Ain't nowhere to take her. Just figure we let her stay here tonight. Figure the rest out when she wake up.

CHELLE

We can't keep her here.

LANK

What else you wanna do Chelle? Leave her in a alley?

CHELLE

I ain't sayin' that, but she can't stay here!

LANK

What's it gonna hurt- one night?

CHELLE

What you think gonna happen when this white girl wake up in a house full of colored folks in the ghetto? You think she gonna be thankful and happy you saved her when she see all these gashes on her face? You think she gonna be able to distinguish one colored fool from the next?

LANK

How you know it was a colored fool?

CHELLE

I pray it wasn't. But if it was... we all in trouble. Even if it wasn't... all she got to do is say it was, and we all in trouble.

LANK

I know that, Chelle. Don't you think I know that?

CHELLE

If you know that then why is she still layin' on this couch? Let's get Sly, and let's go drop her down off at the hospital.

LANK

They takin' names down at the hospital. 'Less we just dump her at the door and keep rollin', they gonna have our names. See our faces. They wanna pin somethin' on two colored men, they just got the names and faces.

CHELLE

Then drop her off and let's keep rollin'.

LANK

Chelle! I ain't gonna do that, now. Have some kinda heart.

CHELLE

I got a heart! I got a mind and a gut too. And they all throwin' up caution signs every which-a-way.

LANK

I say she can stay here through the night, Chelle. We can do that much.

Sly re-enters with the ointment.

SLY

Found some ointment. Some bandages and tape too.

He hands them to Chelle. She begins applying it to Caroline and bandaging her up.

SLY

So where we gonna take her?

LANK

She stayin' here for the night.

SLY

That right?

CHELLE

That's what Lank say.

LANK

She stay til' the morning, and we help her get on her way.

SLY

That's what you say, then that's what it is.

Sly heads to the stairs.

SLY

I'ma go'on home then. Catch you when the sun come up...

Sly stumbles on the stairs. Lank hurries over and helps him.

LANK

Gimme them keys, man. I got the wheels.

Chelle continues to bandage  
Caroline...carefully. Meticulously.

LANK

Be right back, Chelle. You got this?

CHELLE

I guess I do, don't I?

Lank helps Sly up the stairs. They disappear behind the door.

Chelle finishes bandaging Caroline. She stands and studies her quietly for a moment.

She grabs a pillow and props Caroline's feet up. Then she covers her back up, heads to the stairs.... Looks back with reluctance...

Shaking her head, she goes up the stairs.

CHELLE

(softly aloud)

Good Lord, don't let it be no niggers...

She hits the light and disappears behind the door.