

The Mountaintop

by Katori Hall (from: Katori Hall Plays One)

Lights up. Night. 3 April 1968. Room 306, the Lorraine Motel, Memphis, Tennessee. The outside street lights project the shadows of rain sliding down the pane on to the walls.

*The motel room door creaks open. The rain pours outside. Enter **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** Tired. Overwrought. Wet. He is ready to take his shoes off and crawl into bed. He coughs. He is hoarse. He stands in the doorway, the red and yellow motel sign casting a glow on to his face. He yells out of the door into the stormy night.*

King Abernathy, get me a pack of Pall Malls, when ya go. Naw. Naw. Naw. I said Pall Malls. I don't like those Winstons you smoke. You can call me siddity all you like, I want me a Pall Mall. Pall Malls, man! Don't be cheap. Be back soon, man. I'm wanting one. Bad. That's right ... That's right ...

He closes the door. He locks the deadbolt. Click. He chains the door. Rattle. Then he pulls the curtain tight over the window. He walks around in the darkness, but he knows the lay of the room well. He turns on a lone lamp that instantly illuminates the room. Water stains pockmark the walls. Bright orange and fading brown sixties decor accent the room. The carpet is the color of bile. He loosens his tie. Unbuttons his shirt. Coughs.

An opened briefcase lies on one of the two full beds, covered with rumpled peach sheets. He picks up his sermon papers from the bed.

(Reading.) 'Why America is going to Hell ...'

He goes into the bathroom.

'Why America is going to Hell ...'

We hear him urinate. He flushes the toilet. He walks back into the room.

They really gonna burn me on the cross for that one.

'America, you are too ARROGANT!'

He goes to the nightstand and checks the empty coffee cups.

What shall I say ... what shall I say ...

He goes to the black rotary phone on the night stand between the beds. He dials.

America ... Ameri —

He stops. In complete silence: unscrews the receiver. Checks the phone for bugs. None there. Screws the receiver back. Checks the night stand. None there. Sighs. Dials again.

Room service? There's not any more room service, tonight? When did it stop? Last week? We were here last week and y'all were still serving room service till midnight. Been always able to get me a cup of coffee when I wanted it. Needed it. Pardon? I just want a coffee. One cup. *(Pause.)* Thank you! Got to do some work before I go to bed. You can bring it on up. Room 306. *(He smiles a broad smile.)* Yes, we call it the 'King-Abernathy Suite' too. I appreciate that, sir. We thank you for your prayers, sir. We're not gonna stop. These sanitation workers gonna get their due. I'm here to make sure of that. Yes, sir! My autograph, sir? *(Beat.)* Uhhh ... I don't give those out. I only give thanks. Sorry, sir. Yes. It'll

be right up? Five minutes? Thank you kindly. Kindly.

He hangs up. He gives the phone a 'what the fuck was that about' look.

'America, America, my country 'tis of thee ...'

He begins to take off his shoes.

'My country who doles out constant misery —'

He smells them.

Woooooh! Sweet Jesus. I got marching feet and we ain't even marched yet!

He throws them down. He turns to rifle through his suitcase.

Shit. She forgot to pack my toothbrush again.

He dials on the rotary phone.

(Singing to himself.) Corrie, pick up ... Corrie pick up, Corrie, Corrie, Corrie, pick up ...

She doesn't. He puts the phone down.

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My country who doles out constant misery. War abroad. Then war in your streets. *(Under his breath.)* 'Arrogant America.' What shall I do with bbbbbb —

He throws himself back on the bed. There is a knock at the door. He rushes to go and answer. He undoes the deadbolt, then the chain.

Reverend, about time, man. The store ain't but down the street —

Enter Camae, a beautiful young maid. She stands in the doorway, one hand holding a newspaper over her head to catch the rain, the other balancing a tray with a cup of coffee.

Camae Room service, sir.

King That was fast.

Camae Well, I been called Quickie Camae befo'.

He is taken aback, stunned by her beauty. She waits and waits and waits. He snaps out of it.

King Where are my manners? Come on in.

He steps aside. She walks in. Dripping over everything.

Camae Where would you like me to put this?

King On the table over there.

She sets the tray on the downstage table, bending slightly at the waist. King appreciates his view. Beat. She looks back; he looks away.

King How much is that gonna cost?

Camae Folk down there say it's on the house. For you. It like this yo' house, they say. So you ain't gotta pay them. But you *can* pay me a tip for gettin' my press 'n curl wet out in this rain.

She holds out her hand. He smiles and pulls money from his billfold.

King You new?

Camae First day, sir.

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King That's why. I haven't seen you before. Stayed here plenty a' times, but I've never seen your face.

Camae I done seen yo's befo' though.

King Oh, have you?

Camae Of course. On the TV down at Woolworth's. You like the Beatles.

King Wish folks would listen to me like they listen to the Beatles.

Camae Mmhm. 'Specially white folks.

King *laughs, then breaks into a fit of coughs.*

Camae Sound like you needin' some tea, not no coffee. You got a cold?

King (*straining*) Just done got to getting hoarse. Shouting.

Camae And carryin' on.

King No, not carrying on. Testifying.

Camae Shame I ain't get a chance to see ya tonight. I heard you carried on a storm up at Mason Temple.

King How you know?

Camae Negro talk strike faster than lightnin'. They say folks was all cryin'. Sangin'. Mmph. Mmph. Mmph. I woulda liked to have seen that. Somethin' to tell my chiren. 'When I wun't nothin' but a chick-a-dee, I seen't Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr cuttin' up in the pulpit.' Mmmhmm. I bet that was somethin' to see.

King *goes to peek out of the window.*

King Wish it had been more folks there.

Camae How many was there?

King Mmmm. A couple thousand.

Camae Honey, that a lot.

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King Coulda been more in my humble opinion.

Camae But it was stormin'. Tornadoes and all get out. You can't get no Negro folks out in no rain like this.

King And why is that?

Camae God'll strike you down if you move 'round too much. That what my momma used to say. When it storm like this my momma'd say, 'Be still!' But I thank she just wanted us chiren to sit our tails down somewhere 'cause the lightnin' spooked her nerves so bad. Personally, I just thank God be actin' up.

King Do He? Is that why *you* didn't come?

Pause. She wants to say something, but changes her mind.

Camae Naw. It my first day here. At work. Wanted to come in early.

King Well, I can't blame folks. Shoot, / almost didn't go.

Camae Why that?

King Ain't been feeling too good.

Camae Aww, a little sick?

King You could say that ... Personally, I don't think God's what kept folks in their houses tonight. Folks just don't care.

Camae Folks 'fraid of gettin' blown up. Churches ain't even safe for us folks.

Thunder and lightning. Boom. Boom. Crackle! King jumps slightly.

Camae You ... all right?

King (*fidgeting*) Sure ... sure.

Beat. She goes stage left, checks the bathroom. Takes some wet towels out and slings them across her shoulder.

Camae You need anythang else 'fore I go?

King Actually ... if you got a cigarette ...

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Camae Cigarettes *and* coffee? That ain't a diet befittin' of a preacher.

King 'Judge not and ye shall not be judged.'

Camae Honey, I hears that. I guess if you was at home you'd be eatin' mo' right.

King I suppose.

Camae What you miss the most she make?

King Her egg sandwiches.

Camae Mmm. I likes them, too. Make one every day for myself.

She pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Offers him one. He takes it gladly. Looks at it closely. Staring her down, he puts it in his mouth. She takes out a lighter. Lights it for him.

King Not too many women running 'round smoking Pall Malls. Impressive.

Camae Quite. My daddy smoked Pall Malls. Said Kools'll kill ya.

King Have yourself one.

Camae What?

King Smoke one with me.

Camae (*smiling*) Naw, naw, Preacher Kang. You 'bout to have my boss up after me. I don't know what the rules is yet. Don't know where the dark corners in this place is to hide and smoke my Pall Malls. Don't even know which rooms to lay my head for a quick nap.

King What about this one?

Beat. She looks at the bed.

Camae Last folk up in here was doin' the hoochie coochie for pay. I wouldn't lay down in that bed if somebody paid me.

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King So what kinds of rules does a little lady like you break?

Camae None that involve no preacher, I tells ya that.

King Everybody should break a rule every now and then.

Camae Yessir. I's agrees witcha. But not tonight ... *Not* tonight.

King Have one wit' me. They're not gonna come looking for you.

Camae (*laughing nervously*) You the one gone get caught. Kidnappin' me like this.

King Just one. Till my friend come back with my pack.

Beat. She sighs. She takes a cigarette out and lights it. Inhales. Lets it all out. They look at each other.

Camae You sho'll do try hard at it.

King Well ... you're pretty.

Camae I know. Even my uncle couldn't help hisself. You have fun tonight?

King Fun?

Camae It gotta be fun. Otherwise you wouldn't do it.

King Not any fun in this.

Camae Sound like grand fun to me. Standin' up there in the middle of them great big old churches. People clappin' for you. Fallin' out. (*To herself.*) Must be muthafuckin' grand to mean so much to somebody. Shit, *goddamn* must be grand. (*Beat.*) Where a needle and thread to sew up my mouth? Here I is just a' cussin' all up in front of you, Dr. Kang. I cuss worser than a sailor with the clap. Oooo, God gone get me! I'm goin' to hell just for cussin' in front of you. Fallin' straight to hell.

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He laughs.

King No ma'am, 'cordin' to your face, you done fell straight from heaven.

He sips his coffee.

Camae You lil' pulpit poet you. I likes you.

King I 'likes' you, too.

The phone rings.

Excuse me.

Camae Well, I'll just be on my —

*He motions for her to stay. Then puts on his **King** voice'.*

King Dr. King, here. (*Voice shifts.*) Oh, Corrie. Yes. I did call. You didn't pick up. Oh. You were at a meeting. Oh. It went fine. Not as many people there, but ... it was enough. I am getting hoarse, I know. Yes, I'm drinking my tea. I'm drinking tea right now.

He looks at Camae, who snickers. He motions for her to be quiet.

King You know you forgot to pack my toothbrush? Yeap.

He laughs, checks his breath.

I'll just get another one in the morning. Don't worry, darling. You can't remember everything. (*Silence.*) Did they call? What they say this time? Hmm. Hmm. Ugly voices. Mmph. You worried? I'm not.

He takes a long drag on his cigarette.

The children asleep? Oh. *She* still up. She shouldn't be up so late past midnight. Oh, she can't sleep. Well, let me talk to her. (*Pause.*) Hey, it's Paw. Mmmhmm. What Paw say? You have to listen to your Ma when Paw's not there. Yes. You having trouble sleeping? Me too, sometime. You know what I do? I just lay down and pray for a bit and that makes me nod off in no time. It makes everything real peaceful. You promise you gonna be good? Okay, let Paw speak to your Ma. Oh. She's in the bathroom, now? Just tell Yolanda and the boys Paw'll see 'em when I get back. Tell Ma I love her. Goodnight, Bernice.

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He hangs up the phone.

Camae You shouldn't lie like that.

King Like what?

Camae About drinkin' tea. Lyin' tail.

King Coffee can't cure a cold, can it?

Camae Coffee wit' some whiskey in it can.

She pulls out a flask and casts a dollop into his cup.

This what the Irish call 'cough syrup'.

King *laughs heartily.*

Camae She's beautiful. Yo' wife. I seen't her on the TV down at Woolworth's, too. Corretta Scott K —

King (*correcting*) Mrs. King.

Camae Oh. Yes. Mrs. King.

He drinks his coffee.

King The color of coffee with a lot of milk and a lot of sugar. Just how I like it.

Camae Well, I likes my coffee black and bitter.

He looks at the name tag on her chest.

King 'Carrie Mae'. That's not what you said earlier.

Camae Folk shorten it. Call me Camae.

King Carriemae?

Camae Naw, naw, na! CA—MAE. Camae.

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King Doesn't make any sense.

Camae It do too. Say it wit' me. (*Slowly.*) Camae.

King Cammmae.

Camae Camae!

King (*teasing*) CAR—mae?

Camae CAMAE!

King (*laughing*) Camae!

Camae (*laughing too*) Right! Right! There ya go. Sound good comin' outcho mouth.

King A lot of things do.

Camae Sho'll do.

King Sho'll do.

Beat.

Camae Well, you axe for me if you need anythang else. Just pick up the phone and give me a hollah. The switchboard man'll get me.

King I can ask for you especially?

Camae If me is what you want.

Beat.

King Alrighty then.

Camae Alrighty then.

She slowly makes her way to the door. She looks back to him. Smiles. She opens the door. The storm has gathered more fury outside. BOOM, BOOM. BOOM!!

King (*stuttering*) C-c-can I ask you a question before you go? And you promise to answer me open and honest?

Camae Depend on what the question is.

King You won't think me less of a man, if I ask?

Camae I might.

King I've been needing a woman's perspective on this.

Camae Like I say, it depend on the question. Shoot.

She closes the door. Beat.

King Do you think I should shave off my mustache?

Beat.

Camae Yes. I was just sayin' that to myself just then, 'He look so damn ugly with that mustache.'

King Really?

Camae Naw! I thought you was gone ask me about somethin' mo' important than that.

King That is important! My physical appearance is important. To the people.

Camae Gone on somewhere wit' that!

King I'm serious! Tell me the truth. Mustache, no mustache?

He covers his mustache with his hand, then uncovers and covers again.

Mustache or no mustache? Mustache or no mustache?

Camae (*laughing*) Where is that man witcho Pall Malls so you can stop axin' me crazy questions?

King I don't know where Ralph is. I just thought I'd get a woman's opinion.

Camae Well, have you axed yo' wife?

Beat.

King No.

Camae Well, axe her then. She the one supposed to make them kinds of decisions anyway.

King *goes to the mirror downstage and peers at his face.*

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King Just tryin' to shave some years off. I done got to looking old.

Camae You have. You look older. In person. When women get older, they get ugly. When men get older they get ... handsome. Wrinkles look good on a man. Especially when they got some money to go wit' they wrinkles.

King Women do like men with wrinkles, don't they?

Camae I don't. I likes 'em young and wild. Like me.

King Like you?

Camae Yes, Preacher Kang.

King (*smiling at the memory*) I used to be young and wild myself.

Camae You a preacher. That's part a' y'all job requirement. How you know what you ain't supposed to do if you ain't done it, yaself? Folk won't listen to you otherwise. That what I call 'work experience'. More than qualify ya for the position.

King And what qualify you to be a maid?

Camae I'm betta at cleanin' up other folks' messes than my own. I was called to do this.

King Well. I think I was, too.

He sees that his cigarette is finished.

Can I have another one?

Camae You ain't gone leave me here to work through the night wit nothin' to smoke on. Shhhh-iiii — oooot! All I got is one square left.

King Perhaps we can share?

He moves closer to her. Beat.

Camae Like, I say, you *sho'll* try hard at it.

He holds his hand out.

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King Well, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

As she speaks the following, she hands him her last cigarette. Lights it for him. Then throws her empty pack into the trash can.

Camae Mmph, mmph, *mmph!* These goddamn folk got you chain smokin' harder than a muthafucka.

Beat.

There I go! Got to cussin' again. I am so sorry, Preacher Kang. I am *so sorry*. I should be shamed of myself. God gone get me for that one, too.

King Don't worry. I forgive you.

Camae I'm glad somebody do.

They look at each other softly.

King Well, I guess you got other folks' messes to clean up ... I don't mean to keep ya. Don't forget your umbrella.

He hands her the wet newspaper she had brought in.

Camae Unh, unh. That ain't mine. Thass yours. Boss told me to bring that up for you. Sorry, I got it wet.

King Well, I thank ya. Thank ya kindly.

He looks at the newspaper.

April 4th? How'd y'all get tomorrow's paper?

Camae (*shrugs*) Tomorrow already here.

King (*reads*) 'King Challenges Court Restraint. Vows to March' — they got that right! This Mayor Loeb calls himself not allowing these sanitation workers to march. (*To himself.*) Over my dead body. 'Yesterday two US marshalls sped across town to serve the Negro leaders with copies of the order. They found Dr. King and four other defendants at the Lorraine Motel ... ' (*He reads further and further.*)

Camae Folks can send you flowers. Since they know where you stayin'.

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King That ain't the only thing they can send me. (*Reads.*) 'The city said it was seeking the injunction as a means of protecting Dr. King ... We are fearful that in the turmoil of the moment, someone may even harm Dr. King's life ... and with all the force of language we can use, we want to emphasize that we don't want that to happen ... ' (*Chuckles to himself.*) Wish the mayor had jurisdiction over airplanes, too. You know, Camae, somebody called in a bomb threat on my plane from Atlanta to Memphis? Thank God they didn't find one.

Camae Just another day on the job.

King Mmmhmm.

Camae Civil rights'll kill ya fo' them Pall Malls will.

Beat. They look at each other. Then laugh really, really hard.

King I like your sense of humor. Like mine ... morbid.

They laugh harder and harder ... BOOM! Crickle, CRACK. The thunder rolls. King jumps, terribly frightened.

(Slightly embarrassed, laughing it off.) Wheew! Thought they got me!

He puts his hand over his chest. He begins to breathe hard.

Camae You all right! You all right!

King Yes. Yes. I am.

He tries to collect himself.

Camae Don't tell me a grown man like you 'fraid of a lil' lightnin'?

King No. *(Beat.)* No, that's not what I'm afraid of.

Camae Oh. The thunder?

King Yes, the sound. It sounds like —

Camae Fireworks.

He contemplates this for a spell.

King Yes. Indeed it does.

Camae Don't be scurred of a lil' fireworks. I loves me some fireworks. Mama used to take us on down to Tom Lee Park to see the fireworks every Fourth of July.

King Independence Day.

Camae That right, y'all bougie black folk call it Independence Day. I can't seem to quite call it that yet.

King You sho'll is pretty, Camae.

Camae That 'bout the third time you done tole me that.

King Second.

Camae The first time you told me witcho eyes.

King You saw me?

Camae Hell, a blind man coulda seen't the way you was borin' holes through my clothes. Awww, you blushin'?

King *(nods his head)* Which is really hard for a black man to do. I'm embarrassed.

Camae Shuga, shush. You just a man. If I was you, I'd be starin' at me, too.

King Well, I guess it's your turn to forgive me.

Camae Forgiven and forgotten.

King Thank you, Camae. For the ... *square*?

Camae I got some family from Detroit. That what they call 'em up there.

King So you've been to Detroit? How'd you like it?

Camae I said I got family from up there. I ain't never been.

King Don't.

Camae Why?

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King Negro folks done seemed to have lost their manners up there. Like to riot and carry on.

Camae Honey, I need to move up there then. 'Cause these white folks down here 'bout to be catchin' flies now the way they be actin wit' Negroes these days. I need to catch the first Greyhound up there. Detroit niggah heaven, you axe me.

King So are you an honorary Panther?

She growls like a panther, she's pretty good.

Camae Walkin' will only get you so far, Preacher Kang.

King We're not just walking: we're marching.

Camae Whatever it is, it ain't workin'.

King It doesn't work when you have trifling Negroes who call themselves using a peaceful protest to get a free color television.

Camae Who done did that?

King Just last week me and my men organized a march for —

Camae Them garbage men?

King (*correcting*) Yes, the *sanitation workers*. Must have been thousands upon thousands of people there. Thousands! Everybody from old men to teenage girls to little boys holding up signs that read, 'I AM A MAN'. Somehow they squeezed me to the front, we linked arms and the march began. 'I AM A MAN! I AM A MAN!' we shouted. Well, we hadn't walked but one block before we heard the sound of glass breaking. I was swept up in a tornado of arms, legs, coughing, mace. I didn't wanna leave those people, Camae. I did not wanna leave them, but ... my men pushed me into a passing car, and ... I looked through that back window and saw such blessed peace descend into chaos. (*Beat.*) Don't they know, you can't be marchin' down the street, bust into store windows, and then go get you a free color television? We're marching for a living wage ... not a damn color TV! It just gives these police an excuse to shoot innocent folks. Like that boy ... that *sixteen-year-old* boy they shot. Last week? (*Quietly to himself.*) Larry Payne. Larry Payne. Larry Payne. I'll never forget his name ... Well, we back and we gonna do it right this time. So Larry Payne won't have to have died in vain.

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He peeks out of the window, talking as if Camae is not there.

King Where is that niggah wit' my pack?

Camae Maybe he got stuck talkin' wit' some crazy lady in a motel room, too.

King *does not laugh.*

Camae I'm funny. Laugh.

King I'm worried. I don't want anything to happen to him. He happen upon something in the night don't know what I'd do without him.

Camae That your best friend?

King More loyal than a dog. He the one called me down to the church tonight. Got me out of bed. Just ain't been feelin' right.

Camae *gazes at him softly.* **King** *shakes himself out of it.*

King He probably downstairs wit' my brother 'nem. Don't like to hang around me too much. I done got to bein' so moody nowadays. 'Forget about last week, Martin,' he says. Forget about it ... (*He smiles painfully.*) After the march, the papers called me 'Chicken à la King'. Said I was a Commie coward that leaves other people to clean up my mess. 'Martin Loser King ...'

Camae Seem like times been a little rough on you.

King Who you telling? Who are you telling ... (*He peeks out of the window.*) This rain's just relentless. Looking like a monsoon in Memphis.

Camae (*looks at him somberly*) Well, God ain't gone stop cryin' no time soon.

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He hands her his half-smoked cigarette. Beat. She takes it. She takes a long drag between her forefinger and her thumb.

King You smoke like a man.

Camae *You* smoke like a fruit.

King Aww, Camae, don't use those kinda words ...

Camae What, you root for the fruits?

King Indeed I do. Alla God's children got wings.

Camae Well ... I agrees witcha on that one. But ... you just ain't smokin' it right.

King Well, how am I *supposed* to smoke it?

Camae Like it's going out of style. Like you need it. Like you want it. That's how I smoke. Make a woman feel sexy. I bet I know why you smoke.

King Why?

Camae To feel sexy. 'Cause you look it.

Beat.

King Aw, Camae. Now, you really makin' me blush. (*Pause.*) I do though, don't I?

Camae Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr. Smoking. Ain't that somethin'? Wish I could take a picture of it.

King What, you with the FBI?

Camae Naw. Something bigger.

She hands him back the cigarette. He smokes it like a 'man'. He strikes a sexy pose and blows out a circle ring. Camae pretends to snap pictures.

There ya go. Just like that. Just like that! Pull harder. Harder. If you want to lead the people

you got to smoke like the people. That way the people'll listen to ya.

Beat.

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King You don't think they listen?

Camae Oh, they listen. They go out and march. Then they get they press 'n curls ruined by fire hoses. Folk done got tired though, Preacher Kang. (*Sighs.*) Like I say, walkin' will only get us so far —

King (*annoyed*) Well, killin' will get you hung.

Camae Ain't nobody said nothin' 'bout no killin'. Camae all about ass whippins. How about a march for ass whippins?

King That's not gonna do.

Camae Well, we need to be doin' somethin' else.

King So what are we supposed to do?

Camae Somethin'. Somethin' else. Hell, I got bunions and corns for days.

She takes off her shoes and sits down on the bed to rub her feet.

King Y'all Negroes always want to complain but never have another plan of action. You sound worse than Andy or, better yet, Jesse. Everybody can shoot holes in your ideas, but they can only come up with 'somethin' else'.

Camae I got a plan. But ... *I'm* just a woman. Folk'll never listen to me.

King So if you were me, what would you do?

Camae Really? You wanna know what lil' old me would do?

King Yes.

Camae You really wanna know what I'd do?

King Yes. I. Do.

Beat.

Camae Can I borrow yo' jacket?

King Sure.

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Camae And yo' shoes?

He hands them to her. She puts them on. She stands on top of one of the beds. King looks on in awe. She steadies herself. Throughout her speech King is her congregation, egging her on with well-timed sayings like, 'Well!' 'Preach!' Or 'Make it plain!'

Camae (*with a King' voice*) Chuuch! We have gathered here today to deal with a serious issue. It is an issue of great paponderance — you like that? — paponderance! It is a matter of importance more serious than my overgrown mustache: *how do we deal with the white man?* I have told you that the white man is our brother. And he should be treated as such. We touch our brother with the softest of hands. We greet our brother with the widest of smiles. We give our brother food when he is hungry. But it is hard to do this when our brother beats his fist upon our flesh. When he greets us with 'Nigger' and 'Go back to Africa', when he punches us in our bellies swelling with hunger. Abel was slain by his brother Cain and, just like the Biblical times, today the white man is killing his Negro

brethren, shackling his hands, keeping us from rising to the stars we are booooouuuuund to occupy. We have walked. Our feet swelling with each step. We have been drowned by hoses. Our dreams being washed away. We have been bitten by dogs. Our skin forever scarred by hatred at its height. Our godly crowns have been turned into ashtrays for white men at lunch counters all across the South. To this I say, my brethren, a new day is coming. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired, and today is the day that I tell you to KILL the white man! (*Sotto voce.*) But not with your hands. Not with your guns. But with your miiiind! (*Back to regular voice.*) We are fighting to sit at the same counter, but *why*, my brothers and sisters? We should build our own counters. Our own restaurants. Our own neighborhoods. Our own schools. The white man ain't got nothin' I want. Fuck the white man! *Fuck* the white man! I say, FUCK 'em!

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Camae looks to **King** sooooo embarrassed.

Camae I AM SO SORRY! Preacher, Kang. Oooooooo. I just can't control my mouth.

King Obviously, neither can I.

She steps down off the bed. And begins to pull off his jacket.

Camae Well, you axed. That's what I would say ... *if...* I was you.

King That's what you would have me say?

Camae Why not?

King 'Fuck the white man'? (*Long heavy beat.*) I likes that. I think that'll be the title of my next sermon.

Camae Oooooo! Folks ain't gone know what to do with that.

King Amen! Fuck 'em!

Camae I never thought I'd hear you say that!

King Ooooo! They got me so tired, Camae. All this rippin' and runnin', rippin' and runnin' around this entire world, and for what? FOR WHAT? White folks don't seem to want to listen. Maybe you're right. Maybe the voice of violence is the only voice white folks'll listen to. (*He coughs.*) I'm tired of shoutin' and carryin' on, like you say. I'm hoarse.

He grabs Camae's flask and drinks.

King Sometimes I wonder where they get it from. This hatred of us. I have seen so many white people hate us, Camae. Bombin' folks' homes. Shootin' folks ... blowin' up children.

Camae Make you scared to bring a Negro child into this world the way they be blowin' 'em up.

King Yes, Camae! They hate so easily, and we love too much.

212

Camae Last time I heard you was preachin' 'everybody the same'. Negro folk. White folk. We all alike.

King Well, at the most human level we *are* all the same.

Camae What one thing we all got in common?

Beat. He searches hard to come up with an answer.

King We scared, Camae. We all scared. Scared of each other. Scared of ourselves. They just scared. Scared of losin' somethin' that they've known their whole lives. Fear makes us human. We all need the same basic things. A hug. A smile. A —

Camae Smoke?

King (*frustrated*) Which I could use one more of. Where is that niggah wit' my pack?

Camae *goes to the window, but can't see past the rain.*

King He always out there runnin' his mouth. Worse than me sometimes. You see him?

Camae Naw.

King He'll be back. He know I don't like to be alone too long ...

Beat. He looks back towards Camae.

King I just wish you had another one. To share, of course.

Camae *pulls another pack of Pall Malls from her maid's uniform. King stands confused.*

King I thought you gave me your last one?

Camae I did. But I'm a magician. I got more where that came from.

King More tricks up your sleeve?

Camae Well, as you can tell ... I ain't yo' ordinary ole maid.

He looks her up and down.

King Certainly. Certainly! Not too many maids spouting off well-formed diatribes like that.

213

Camae What, you thank us po' folk can't talk? You thank we dumb?

King Naw, naw, that's not what I said, now —

Camae You thank you always gotta talk for us?

King No, that's not what I said —

Camae Then what you sayin'?

King I'm sayin'... that most maids don't sound like professors.

Camae Well, let me school you, you bougie Negro. I don't need no PhD to give you some knowledge, understand. Divinity school? *Huh!* You don't know who you *messin' wit!*

King Well, Camae, I just ... I just like ya style. Didn't mean to offend ya. Just wanted to compliment ya. You sang it real pretty.

She calms down.

Camae Well ... tell me ... how are my 'oratorical skills' — see ye'en thank I knew them words — How are my *oratorical skills* compared to —

King Mine?

Camae Sho.

Beat.

King I'm better.

Camae Awww, really, now?

King You made it sound real pretty, now, but really ... *I'm* better. Nobody can make it pretty like me. I've been doing this for years, darlin'. Gonna be doin' it till the day I die.

Camae But was it good?

King For a woman, yes.

214

Camae And if I was a man?

King Then you'd be Malcolm X.

Camae So, you callin' Malcolm X a sissy?

King No, that's not what I said, Miss Camae.

Camae You callin' Malcolm X a sissy!

King No, I'm not, Camae.

Camae I'ma tell it on you!

She runs and opens up the door and screams at the top of her lungs into the pouring night sky.

MALCOLM, MARTIN THANK YOU A SISSY!!!

King CAMAE! Come from out that door! / You gone get STRUCK!

Camae You hear that, Malcolm! He callin' you A SISSY!!

The thunder rolls and Camae laughs at the sky threatening to crackle again.

(To Malcolm in the sky.) I'd strike him down for that, too, if I was you.

King *grabs her by the waist and slams the door.*

King Didn't your mama teach you how to be still when it's thundering and lightning?

Camae Didn't I tell you I was hard-headed and ain't mind her one bit?

King Well, God don't like to be laughed at.

Camae Why? I laugh at God all the time. God funny as Hell. God a fuuuunnnny-ass muthafucka.

Beat.

King I don't like the way you talk about God. You might need to leave you blaspheming God like that.

215

Beat.

Camae I was just tryin' to make you laugh. Bring a little laughter to your life. I like makin' folks laugh, Preacher Kang. God knows you need it —

King I don't mind laughin'. I like a good joke. Got to. Nowadays. I just don't like how you talk about God.

Camae I'm sorry. God don't mind it. God ain't like siddity folk. God even like dirty jokes.

King How you know what God like?

Camae 'Cause I do. I know God liked Malcolm X. And you woulda liked him, too. He didn't drank. Smoke. Cuss. Or ... Cheat. On. His Wife.

Beat.

King (*wryly*) And how are you privy to this information?

She stares him down.

Camae Like, I said befo', Negro talk strike faster than lightnin'. (*Pause.*) Did you ever meet him?

King Once. But we never got a chance to really —

Camae Talk?

King Before he got —

Camae Killed? (*Pause.*) That's a shame.

King He was only thirty-nine. (*To himself.*) I'm thirty-nine ...

Pause.

Camae He in heaven.

King Is that right?

Camae You'll see him there ... One day.

King Camae, you talk a lot of nonsense sometimes.

216

Camae Nonsense comin' out of a pretty woman's mouth ain't nonsense at all. It's poetry.

King No, I think that's — what would yo' kinda folk say — *bullshit?*

Camae Oooooo, I likes it when ya feathers get ruffled. You get all blunt. It look cute on you. But you will. In heaven.

King So you think he in heaven right now?

Camae Why wouldn't he be?

King I don't know, now. He talked a lot of —

Camae Truth?

King A lot of violence. He had a weakness for violent words. Speak by the sword, die by the sword —

Camae Speak by love, die by hate. (*Pause.*) We all have weaknesses, Preacher Kang. I'm sho' you got yo' own. Just ain't never let nobody ... know. (*Beat.*) For what it worth, I know God like *you*. The real *you*.

King Do He really?

Camae *She* likes you.

King *She?*

Camae She told me She like you. That if you was in heaven, you'd be her husband.

King (*smiles a big toothy grin*) Oh, Camae! Is that what God said?

Camae Yeap.

King So God in love with me?

Camae She ain't 'in love', She 'in like'! In like with her some Dr. Kang.

King I think God ain't told you nothin'. I think it's you who want me for yo' husband.

217

Camae Mmmm. Me and God ain't got the same taste. I don't like no man wit' no smelly feet.

King They do stink, don't they? Don't tell nobody.

Camae Honey, yo' shoes off. I thank the whole world know by now. Who woulda thunk Dr. Kang got stanky feet. Oooo! And you got holes in yo' socks, too?

King *laughs at her. At himself.*

King You make it easy.

Camae Make what easy?

King To make a man forget about it all. About ... all ... this ...

Camae That what I'm here for.

King What else you here for?

He has begun to take off his tie. He struggles a bit. He's gotten stuck.

Camae What, you tryin' to lynch yoself? Here let me help ya.

They stand face to face. Close. Camae slowly untangles him from it. He stares into her face. Transfixed. He reaches up to touch her face. She smiles.

King Thank you.

Camae You welcome.

BOOM! BOOM! Crickle! CRACK! King stumbles back in a daze. Faint. He begins to hold his chest.

Camae You awright?

King I can't breathe.

Camae Well, I've been known to have that effect on mens.

King No, I mean. I can't. I can't / can't, can't can't breathe.

218

Camae Oh, my God. Oh, God! / Did I do something wrong?

King I can't can't can't / breathe. I can't breathe.

Camae Oh, my God! I did / something wrong! I did something!

King Can't can't / can't can't can't can't breathe ...

Camae Just look into my eyes./ Just look right there.

King I can't. I can't. I can't.

Camae Michael?

King Can't can't / can't —

Camae Michael! Michael! MICHAEL!! Michael, just breathe!

King (*sotto voce*) — can't can't / can't can't ...

Camae I'ma get you through this. I'ma get you through this night.

Just as soon as it starts, the thunder in King's heart stops, and he sits stunned, staring at Camae. Silence. They breathe together ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ...

King You called me Michael.

Camae (*knowing she did*) I did?

King Yes. You. Did. You called me Michael.

Camae You — you — scared me —

King How would you know that?

Camae Know what?

King To call me that?

Camae Call you what?

King YOU KNOW WHAT THE HELL I'M TALKING ABOUT.

219

Camae Calm, down Mich — I mean, Preacher Kang. I didn't mean to call you out yo' name —

King But that *is* my name. My childhood name. How do you know my real name? My Christian name?

He slowly backs away from her.

(*Softly.*) Oh. So, you one of them, huh?

Camae I'm so sorry. I never wanted to do this. This is so hard for me to do —

King (*shaking his head*) An *incognegro*. A spy.

Camae I was sent to —

King WHAT? Tempt me?

Camae Hell, you was the one tempting me, getting me all off my job!

King I don't wanna hear it. Get out.

Camae No.

King I said get out. You spook.

Camae I was only doing my job —

King I said GET OUT! Coming in here tempting me!

Enraged, King overturns the furniture, searching for bugs he may have glossed over.

Camae Preacher Kang!

King (*yelling to no one in particular*) What, y'all think you can trap me! Record me with a woman! Well, you're not going to catch me!

Camae Preacher Kang, stop / acting so paranoid!

King Sending tapes to my wife. Tryin' to break up my family. Tryin' to break my spirit!

220

Camae Preacher Kang, calm down!

King You think you can break me! (*Screaming to no one in particular.*) Well, you can't break me! You WILL NEVER BREAK ME AGAIN!

King *grabs Camae by her arm and aggressively pulls her towards the door.*

Camae You're hurting me! Preacher / Kang, you're hurting me!!

King How much they pay you, you *spook*? How much?

Camae Let go, you're hurting me!!!

King Where the hell is Ralph? Ralph! I got a spook!

Camae You wrong! You wrong!

King Where in the *hell* is Ralph?

HEY!

He opens the door. A wall of snow covers the doorway.

HEEEeeeey ...

A huge gust of wind blows in snow that piles at his feet. He lets go of Camae's arm. He stands in awe. Looking at the snow.

King It's snowing ... in April.

Camae It snow sometimes in spring. Here. In Memphis.

He looks back at her. He looks back at the snow at his feet. He looks back at her again. Beat. He closes the door. Then opens it again. He blinks.

King It's still there. The snow. It's still there.

Camae As it should be.

He closes the door again.

King No, no, no, I'm just tired. I'm tired. I'm seeing things that ain't there.

221

Camae Oh, it's there.

King No, it's not. Tell me it's not.

He pulls the curtains back from the windows. They, too, are filled to the brim with snow.

Camae See, it's there.

King No. No. No. You've drugged me. Slipped something in my coffee. Some hippie pills in my coffee! Got me seeing things that ain't there.

Camae I just put some whiskey up in there to relax you —

King You put some hippie pills in my coffee! Made me see. Snow. Snow? Snow ...

He opens the door again and sees the snow is still there. His heart threatens to jump out of his chest.

I can't can't can't go anywhere. I can't get out. I can't get *out*!

Camae Relax! *Calm down!*

He rushes to the phone. Picks it up.

King Help! HELP! No dial tone.

Camae Michael!

King Quit calling me that! QUIT CALLING ME THAT!!

Camae *lunges toward him. He jumps over the bed.*

Camae We need to calm you down! You gone give yoself a heart attack. You might be thirty-nine but you got the heart of a sixty-year-old man.

King I can't can't can't go. I can't can't.

He backs himself against the wall.

Camae Michael! / Shhhhh!!

King How do you know so much about me! Who in the Hell are you? WHO IN THE HELL ARE YOU?

Camae *blows on the end of a cigarette. It lights up. King stands stunned. Looong aaaass beat.*

King Wow.

Camae I know. Angel breath is some hot breath.

King You're. An. Angel?

Camae In the flesh.

King So, where are your wings?

She points to her breasts.

Camae These'll get me anywhere I need to go.

King Wow. An angel?

Camae Yes. I'm here to take you to the other side.

King The other side. So I'm not dead?

Camae No. Not yet.

Beat.

King Wheew! 'Cause I was about to get mad if heaven looked like this.

They look around the room that's been torn apart in their tussle.

(Suddenly very serious.) I'm not going to hell, am I?

Camae Naw. Naw. Naw! Heaven is where we headed.

King *(with wide eyes)* Good. Good. Good. Do all angels look as good as you?

Camae Yes.

King Heaven must be mighty nice then. I wonder what the women in hell look like?

Camae Honey, they finer. Why you thank they in hell?

King Camae, you're really an angel?

223

He looks at her incredulous. She nods her head.

Camae Sorry, I called you Michael. Not too many folk prolly know that 'bout you. God said that yo' Christian name kinda calms you. Ralph call you that, too. Calms you down quick fast. It a nice name. It ain't better than Camae, though.

King I changed it / when my daddy did.

Camae When yo' daddy did. When you was just five. I done read yo' file. But I don't know why y'all wanna be named after some Martin Luther though. I met him in the cafeteria today and he was kinda weird. Very.

He slowly circles Camae.

King You're really an angel?

Camae What else I got to do for you to believe me? Cry flowers?

King But but — but why God send *you*?

Pause.

Camae What you mean by that?

King Why He —

Camae *She!*

King *She* send you? You're not what I was expecting.

Camae Shiiiiit, you wun't what *I* was expecting, *Preacher* Kang!

King Well, I'm not perfect.

Camae That you ain't!

King Hey, hey, don't judge me, you cussin', fussin' drankin' angel!

Camae Well, God know what you like, henh!

King Hey, hey that ain't fair now!

224

Camae The truth ain't gotsta to be fair. It's the truth.

King But *why* you?

Camae Believe you me I ain't want this job. First day? Bring over you? The Kang? I ain't wanna do it. But God been gettin' these prayers from a littl'un named Bunny.

A voice flutters out of Camae's mouth like a butterfly. It softly lands inside the room.

'Please, God, don't let my daddy die alone.' When I heard it ... Well, it just 'bout broke my heart. I just had to come . .

Camae *actually does start to cry, and flowers bloom at her feet.*

Beat.

King You know her nickname ... Bernice, my sweet Bernice. My baby girl spoke to you?

Camae Her prayers are powerful. I can tell she's yourn. She gots a way with words. A gift. Soundin' like she gone be a preacher one day. I don't like chiren too much, but she ... she somethin'.

King My Bunny, my baby girl. Even she knows ...

Camae Yes. I gotta take you to the other side. (*Pause.*) Look, I know you afraid, Preacher Kang —

King How you know I'm afraid?

Camae Because ... You should be.

She points to the door of the motel. Beneath the door burns bright red. The door begins to bulge and wave as fingers begin to push and poke through the door. King slowly walks towards the door, drawn to the danger, drawn to the bullet ...

King (*with total calm*) You talk about fear, Camae, well ... I have felt fear. Felt it in my guts. Felt it in my toes. Felt it even when I stood in front of my own congregation in my own church. There beneath that old rugged cross, I quaked and shook with fear. My insides churned and I fought hard to keep them from leaping out of my mouth. You see, a Negro man is not safe in a pulpit. Not even in a pulpit of his own making. Sunday mornings have been the mornings when I am most afraid. 'Cause in this country a pulpit is a pedestal and we all know that, in America, the tall tree is felled first. Tall trees have more wood to burn, Camae. We are the sacrifice.

225

Camae You been knowin' I was comin', haven't you?

King Yes. Oh, yes. I have dreamed of you. Rather had nightmares. In my darkest hours, I've even prayed for you with eyes wide open. Been so many death threats that some nights I have asked God, 'Please just get it over with.' Even tonight at the church ...

He softly cups her face in his hand.

Who knew death would be so beautiful? Almost make a man wanna die.

Camae You not afraid of me?

King Fear has become my companion, my lover. I know the touch of fear, even more than I know the touch of my own wife. Fear, Camae, is my best friend. She is the reason I get up in the morning. 'Cause I know if I'm still afraid, then I am still alive.

Camae Tomorrow. When it time, you gone have to take my hand.

King Tomorrow? But I'm not ready to die. I still got so much work to do.

Camae But God say it time.

King No, it's not my time. I ain't ready. I still have so much work to do.

He points to the papers back at his desk and he goes to sit down. He writes:

226

King (to **Camae**) 'Why America is going to hell —'

Camae Preacher Kang, now you / gone have to put that down.

King ('King voice' back on) A country that sends its boys to bathe little-bitty brown babies in the blood of our greed is headed for a crossroads of conscience —

Camae You hear what I said, you ain't gone be able to finish that, nanh.

King — And the consequence? Our young are flown back home in star-strangled coffins. Unwashable our hands as we stand at Heaven's gates, wondering why our God will not let us in. And why won't He?

Camae She!!

King She let us in? Cause America is going to Hell! Cast down like Lucifer in the pit to burn, baby burn!

Camae (under her breath) And I thought I was the radical.

King A tsunami of rage is rolling across the bottom of our seas and America, my sweet America, is surrounded by rising water, waiting to drown. Pharaohs will be overthrown when that great wave of change casts them into the roiling waters! But the children of the Nile will rise, they will RISE, my brethren!! Can I get an Amen? I SAID can I get an Amen?

Camae AMEN!!

King (panting, spent from his inspiration) See, that'll make a good sermon, won't it?

Camae Hell, I'd sit in a pew for a few for that one.

King So you agree with me? Well, I gots to finish my sermon and I need to be alone to finish my sermon so ... you gone have to fly on away.

He continues scribbling with his pen, fast and furiously.

227

Camae Preacher Kang —

King Exactly one year ago, I stood in that pulpit at Riverside Church and shouted that this war would be our own violent undoing, freedom's suicide ... Well, I'll tell you, there weren't too many Amens that Sunday. But who is a man who does not speak his heart's conscience? He is not a man, but I *am* a man. If only they could see that love is the most radical weapon there is. But they won't listen. Instead, they have called me every name in the book but a child of God. Even my own men — 'You splitting the movement, Martin, you splittin' the movement! You can't focus on war, and poverty, *and* Negroes!'

Camae Well, ain't you just a civil rights leader? You can't be talkin' bout war, then this, then that.

King And why the hell not?

Camae Who you thank you is, the President? You can't call all the shots, all the time —

King (under his breath) Just for a little bit more time, just a little bit more ...

Still writing.

America, America —

Camae Preacher Kang, —

King — *my country tis of thee* —

Camae You makin' my job harder —

King — *my country who doles out constant misery* —

Camae — harder than it already is —

King — *war abroad, then war in your streets, Arrogant America.*

Camae — this HARD on me.

King (*bolting from his desk*) Hard on *you*? What about it bein' hard on me? On my family? On Corrie? On the movement? HAS GOD THOUGHT ABOUT THAT?!

228

Camae God ain't the one you need to be mad at while you up there yellin'! God ain't the one you need to be blamin' —

King Then who needs to be blamed?

Camae It ain't *who* needs to be blamed, Preacher Kang. It's *what*. It ain't a *who*, it's a *what*, Preacher Kang. Evil is not under God's jurisdiction. But good, *good* is.

King Well, can't you stop it? Catch whatever's coming?

Camae That ain't my job. God said I gotta get you ready to come on home.

King But we still got work to do. I got more sermons in me, more goals, more ... plans!

He gets down on bended knee.

Camae, I wanna do another March on Washington. Bigger. Better. Bolder.

Camae Another *dream* of yours?

King But I wanna make *this* one a reality! The plan. It's all in the works. It's called the Poor People's Campaign!

Camae Poor People's Campaign? What that is? It bet' not be no 'nother march. You / and yo' marches.

King Listen to me.

Camae You and yo / marches!

King Please, Camae! Listen!

She sits down on the bed and starts eating popcorn out of her maid's uniform.

Camae I'm listening. Gone.

King We've been organizing this campaign all year. All year. Imagine, Camae. On the Washington Mall, not thousands, but millions —

229

Camae Millions of Negroes on the Washington Mall? / Shiiiiit.

King No, no, not just Negroes. White folk, Chinese folk, Mexican folk, Indian folk, all banding

together to shame this country. All kinds of poor folks pulling their mule wagons across the Washington Mall. A rainbow of people chanting, 'Stop the war on Vietnam! Start the war on poverty!'

Camae Unh, unh! How 'bout 'Make love! Not poverty!'

King Hey, I like that one, too! They can call me Commie King all they like, I don't care. I refuse to allow poor people to be cast aside along this Jericho Road! That's why we had to come here. Not to walk, but to march. Peacefully. Memphis is just a dress rehearsal for the big one. *Memphis* is just the beginning.

Camae Yo' men'll carry it on.

King But I'm the leader of this movement. The head of the body.

Camae Well, the body will just have to grow another head 'cause Memphis is the end of the road for you.

King End of the road? But ... but ... can't you ... can't you ask God?

Camae Honey, I can't do you no kinda special / favors!

King Just till next month? Till I see this plan on through? Just till April 29th.

Camae And what if She let you? You just gone keep on saying one more day, one more month, one more this, one more that!

King No, I won't.

Camae Yes, you will! I know you, Preacher Kang.

230

King But I have so much work to do —

Camae But what about yo' mens? Can't they see it through?

King They don't dream the same dreams I do, Camae. They think I'm crazy to dream this big, and maybe I am a little crazy, but how can we fight the war in Vietnam but not the wars against Negroes in our streets? How can we try to put a man on the moon but not feed starving children in Mississippi? There's just so much I gotta do. So much I haven't yet accomplished. So much ... I GOTTA FINISH WHAT I STARTED!!

Camae It ain't all about you! *You! You!* Gosh, you men are so selfish. They always thank it's 'bout them. Them! *Them!* Hah! Well, let me tell you something, Preacher Kang. Let me tell you! Like most men, you ain't gone be able to finish what you started.

King My house has been bombed! I have been pelted wit' rocks. My arm twisted behind my back. My face shoved into a ground of gravel. I have been kicked at. Spit at. Pummelled. Abused. Looked at with the deepest scorn. I have been stabbed in my chest. And I walked away. Alive! Alive! If I woulda sneezed I woulda died.

Camae *(under her breath)* Well, I'm glad you ain't have no cold that day.

King *(ignoring her)* Look at the life I've lived. You tell me I ain't got favor wit' God! After all that? Tell me I ain't jumped over every hurdle of this race!

Camae Well, sometimes you done cleared the hurdles and sometimes ... you ain't. Remember Albany? You done brought us far. But you a man. You just a man, baby. You're not God, though some folk'll say you got mighty close. You know ... sometimes, you've failed.

Beat. The wind sinks out of his sails.

231

King Like when that boy ... that boy got shot. Larry Payne.

Camae Well, *that* wun't yo' fault. Police killed that boy. Not you.

Beat. Camae stands silent.

King ... So this motel room will become my tomb? But I have survived so much ...

Camae Honey, I know all about your trials and tribulations. I done read yo' blessings file. It bigger than yo' FBI file and that bigga than the Bible. I know it might be hard for you to leave this life ... yo' family ... and all yo' plans. But you gone have to pass off that baton, little man. You in a relay race, albeit the fastest runner we done ever seen't. But you 'bout to burn out, superstar. You gone need to pass off that baton ...

Beat.

King I know I have dropped this baton so many times over this race. But I promise, I ain't gonna do it again. Tell Her.

Camae Tell Her?

King Yes, tell Her I promise, I won't ever drop this baton again. Tell Her, She needs to let me stay. Ask Her. For me.

Camae (*hissing*) You ain't supposed to question God. That's the rule. You know that!

King There ain't no rules for an angel like you!

Camae Shhiiiiit! God gots rules! I had to read the whole Bible today —

King Please. Camae.

Camae Dr. KANG!

King PLEASE!!

Pause.

Camae Well ... whatchoo gone give *me*?

King (*smiles seductively*) A kiss from the Kang.

Camae I don't want no kiss from you, 'cause you ain't brushed yo' teeth.

King Please, Camae ...

He goes down on bended knee. He plucks one of the flowers from the carpet and hands it to her in submission. Beat.

Camae (*disgusted*) Ughhh.

She snatches it from him. She walks over to the rotary phone on the night stand beside the bed. She dials a really long phone number.

You lucky I 'member this. This just my first day.

She waits and waits ... and waits. Finally, someone on the other end picks up. King sits beside Camae and tries to listen in on the conversation.

Camae Hey, St Augustine. What up? Yeah ... Can I speak to God? (*Beat.*) What She doin'? (*Pause.*) Ohhhh ... (*To King.*) There are some forest fires. She had to go make some rain and — (*To St Augustine.*) Unh, hunh. When She gone be back? Well ... Can you call her cell phone? 'Cause this man is really gettin' on my nerves. I'm tryin' to get him on the

program. Yeah, I KNOW!! That's what I tried to tell him. You know ... Martyrs. (*Pause.*) Sho' can. (*To King.*) He tryin' to get her on the cell.

King The cell?

Camae It's like ... a phone that ain't got no cord.

King A phone wit' no cord?

Camae Sorta like when you talkin' to God. Don't need no real cord, She just sorta ... answers

—

Beat. She perks up. Someone has come to the phone.

Camae Hello there, God. It's me. Camae. Mmmhmmm. How it goin'? (*She looks at King.*) It goin' pretty good. Yep. Yeah, I'm halfway through my shift. Taking a break ... but ... uhm ... Well, there's a bit of problem. (*She pulls the phone away from her ear.*) He say he ain't ready. (*God yells at her ass again.*) That what I told him. I know ... I know ... I KNOW.

233

King Let me talk to Her.

Camae No —

King I wanna talk to yo' supervisor!

Camae *puts her hand over the phone.*

Camae Shhh! I'm tryin' to butter Her up first.

King Butter Her up? Let me talk to Her!!

He tries to snatch the phone from Camae.

Camae Hold on a got gum minute, Preacher Kang! (*Pause.*) Yes. But he stubborn! (*She looks at him.*) And quite convincing. He sho'll do got a way wit' words. I know you told me. You wanna talk to him? Well, good. 'Cause he wanna talk to You.

She hands the phone over to him. King snatches it. Clears his throat. Puts the phone to his ear. Beat.

King Uhm. God? It's uhhh ... (*Putting on his 'King voice'.*) Dr. Martin Luther King, J — oh, yes. Michael, to you ... Yes Ma'am ... yes Ma'am ... yes ... Ma'am. (*He pulls the phone from his ear and whispers.*) Is She —

Camae Black? Mmhm. And PROUD ...

King *puts the phone back to his ear.*

King God, Ma'am, You don't sound like I thought You'd sound. No, no, no. Pardon me, if that offends. I like how You sound. Kinda like my grandmama. Well ... it is a compliment. I loved her dearly ... I love You more, though. Camae told me that you might be busy tonight. Oh, You have time for me? For one of Your favorites?

234

He smiles at Camae, who rolls her eyes.

King God, are You all right? You sound hoarse. Oh, You tired? Well, it must be tiring to be everywhere all at the same time (*He laughs nervously.*) Well, God ... I don't mean to trouble You, Ma'am, but I wanted to ask You something ... You see I have always listened to You, honored Your word, lived by Your word — (*He lowers his voice.*) for the most part — (*Raises it back to normal.*) God, please don't strike me down for askin' this, but ... I want to live. I have plans. Lots of plans in my head and in my heart and my people need me. They need me. And I need to see them to the Promised Land. (*Beat.*) I know that's not what I said earlier tonight, I know, but ... I wasn't lying exactly. (*He looks at Camae.*) I just

didn't know she was comin' so, so ... soon. I meant every word I said tonight when I spoke to those people. Dead honest! No pun intended ... God, I just ... I wanna see my people there, the tide is turning ... war is becoming the order of the day and I must, I must convince them to be vigilant ... We've come too far to turn back now ... God, listen to me ... Who else is better fit for this job? I mean, who will take my place? (*He hears Her answer.*) JESSE?! (*Pause.*) I — I — I just thought Ralph would make a better — No, no, no, no, I have not turned vain. On the contrary. I'm but a servant for You, God, Ma'am. Yes, I've been a servant for You all my life. At one point in time, I might not have been up for the challenge but I knew this was all part for the course and I did Your will. I honored YOUR WILL, God, Ma'am. Let me not die a man who doesn't get to hug his children one last time. Let me not die a man who never gets to make love to his wife one last time. Let me not be a man who dies afraid and alone. (*Long pause.*) Then why'd You pick me, huh? Hmm, no disrespect, but if You didn't know what I could do, what my (*hissing*) *talents* were then ... You got some nerve. Dragging me here to this moldy motel room in Memphis. To die. HUH! Of all places! Well, I *am* angry. There have been many a' nights when I have held my tongue when it came to You. But not tonight, NOT TONIGHT. I have continuously put my life on the line, gave it all up. Gave it all up for You and Your word. You told me, that'd I'd be safe. Safe in Your arms. You protected me all this time, all this time! Glued a pair of wings to my back, but now that've I've flown too close to the sun I'm falling into the ocean of death. God how dare You take me now? NOW! I beg of You. I plead — God? Ma'am? God?

235

Long heavy silence.

Camae (*whispers from the corner*) What She say?

King I think ... I think she hung up on me.

Camae Hmm. Coulda been a dropped call.

Pause.

King A dropped call? How does one 'drop' a call? This angel talk you speak ...

Camae You act like I'm speakin' in tongues.

King Well, you speak of things I know nothing about.

Camae Yes. I speak of the future.

King The future?

Camae (*aggressively*) Ooooo!! YOU DONE GOT ME IN TROUBLE!! God gone tan my hide from brown to barbecue.

King How did I get *you* in trouble?

Camae Look, I can't just call Her for you! You gone make me lose my wings.

She rubs her breasts.

King Good, you need to lose them! Maybe you'll stop luring men to their deaths! (*Pause.*) I can't believe She hung up on me.

Camae I woulda hung up on you, too. Yellin' like that.

King God hung up on me. She forsook her servant.

236

Camae She ain't forsake you neither. She just ain't wanna hear yo' shit. She got the right. She is God, ya know?

King And I am Dr. King, *ya know?*

Beat.

Camae Don't mark me, man ...

King *Ya know? Ya know?*

Camae I do *not* sound like that.

King Least you don't say, ya dig? *Ya dig? Ya dig?* Like a Black Panther Party angel! That's how you would sound if you said it, too. *Ya dig?*

Camae Ohhh.

She picks up a pillow lying on the bed and pelts him with it.

King Camae! God gonna get you. Beatin' up one of Her favorites like this!

Camae Can't believe she done sent me to come get you witcho crazy ass.

She pelts him with a pillow again and again. King picks up a pillow to protect himself. She misses him this time. Laughs heartily.

Camae You thank you so funny, Preacher Man.

King That's right! Hit me! Hit me if you think you bad!

He is quick and surprisingly good at pillow-fighting. He clobbers her over the head with the pillow.

Camae OW!

King That's what you get for battling the Kang of pillow-fightin'!

He pummels her again with the pillow. She flies across the bed.

Camae You can't hit angels with pillows!

King Where is that rule?

Camae In the Bible!

King Unh, unh! Where?

Camae Ezekiel, fool!

She clobbers him one good time. He falls on to the bed. Her pillow bursts and feathers flutter out. Spilling across the room. He hits her back, and his pillow bursts. More feathers fly across the room. They laugh. They laugh as feathers are falling. Falling everywhere like the rain was before and the snow was before. There is a feather blizzard inside Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. And King and his death angel roll in the feather storm of their own making. Their pillows, now devoid of fluff, are tossed to the wayside and then King takes Camae and starts tickling her.

Camae Stop it!

King I bet you're ticklish.

Camae Don't tickle me!

King Why?

Camae 'Cause I'ma pee on you!

King Angels don't pee.

Camae Try me. That's in the Bible, too.

King No, it's not!

Camae Watch out, my piss gone burn you! Tsssss!

King I don't believe you.

Camae You betta!

He tickles her.

I'm peein'! STOP! I'm peein'!

He finally somehow pins Camae on to her back. He is on top of her. They stop. Gazing into each other's eyes. Out of breath. A bit sweaty.

King I never thought death would be so beautiful.

Camae Sometimes. Tonight's a good night. I remembered my rouge.

Beat.

King Camae?

Camae Yes, Preacher Kang.

King Hold me.

Beat. King's eyes well with tears and this strong, grown man dissolves into the child no one ever saw. He slides down on top of her. Crying. Crying his heart out. Sobbing. And Camae holds him. And rubs his back as if he were a child.

Camae (softly) There ... there ... let it all out. Give it all to me. I will take it all ... there ... there ... give it all to me.

King (hiccupping like children do) I've been prayin' that it would stop.

Camae There ... there ... / Shhhh.

King That it would all go away. I never wanted to do this. I just wanted to be a minister in my small church.

Camae But when your maker calls you, you must heed the call.

King I just wanted to be a minister. That was enough. That was enough ...

Camae But God had bigger plans for you.

King Why me?

Camae Why not you?

King 'Cause I'm ... just a man. I know now, I know. And it's time for me to come on home. Help me. Help me get my things together.

He rises and heads to his suitcase. He begins to pack it.

Camae You won't be needing that. Won't be needing that at all. Heaven got all you need.

238

239

King *looks around the room.*

King Well ... I need to leave my men some instructions. Notes.

Camae They can do it on they own.

King But I need to tell them what to do when I'm ... gone.

Camae They'll know what to do. You've taught them well.

Soft pause.

King Well ... well ... my wife ... I need to call my wife ...

He runs to the phone and dials. He sings into it again.

Corrie pick up. Corrie pick up. Corrie, Corrie Corrie pick up.

She doesn't pick up. Silence. He finally hangs up the phone. Long heavy beat.

I always bought her flowers when I went away. Always with the mind that they would last long enough till I made it home. Sometimes they would. Most times they didn't. I could never make amends, so I bought her flowers that would stand in for those passin' pockets of time just as I existed for her. I picked a beautiful flower called 'absence'. And it bloomed like dandelions, a weed she could never rid her garden of. Last week, when I was home, I walked past this shop, and I saw the most perfect flowers. Radiant red carnations. I went into the store, and, you know what I found out, Camae? They weren't real. My eyes had fooled me. But I bought those flowers, and they arrived yesterday morning just before I left to board the plane to Memphis. She came to me, with a twinkle in her eyes and said, 'Why, Martin. You never give me these old artificial things ...' I smiled. 'Today is different. Today ...'

Camae You knew she'd need a flower that could last forever.

King If only I could tell them how sorry I am. If only I could have been there with them. I missed birthdays. I missed holidays. I —

240

Camae You did what you had to do. We needed you. The world needed you.

King Many a' times I've wanted to quit. To give up the ghost.

Camae But you didn't. You prevailed.

King I don't know for what! I've sacrificed my marriage, my family. My health. For what?

Camae Powerful the man that get more done dead than alive.

King I don't want to be a martyr.

Camae But the suit fits you well.

King I am a man. I am just a man.

Camae Tomorrow, you'll be a man made martyr. No, better yet! A saint!

King Don't call me that. I'm a sinner, not a saint. I'm not deservin' of the title.

Camae You think I am?

King You must. God must a' been impressed with how you've lived your life —

Camae *(quietly)* No ... She wun't.

She turns away.

King But I thought angels were perfect.

Camae You perfect?

King No.

Camae Then why should I be? Honey, I've robbed. I've lied. I've cheated. I've failed. I've cursed. But what I'm ashamed of most is, I've hated. Hated myself. Sacrificed my flesh so that others might feel whole again. I thought it was my duty. All that I had to offer this world. What else was a poor black woman, the mule of the world, here for? Last night, in the back of a alley I breathed my last breath. A man clasped his hands like a necklace 'round my throat. I stared into his big blue eyes, as my breath got ragged and raw, and I saw the hell this old world had put him through. The time he saw his father hang a man. The time he saw his mother raped. I felt so sorry for him. I saw what the world had done to him, and I still couldn't forgive. I hated him for stealing my breath. When I passed on to the other side, God — ooooo, She is more gorgeous than me. She the color of midnight and Her eyes are brighter than the stars. Her hair ... well ... just you wait till you see her hair — God stood there before me. With this look on her face. I just knowed She was just soooo disappointed in me. I was just a 'cryin', weepin' at her feet. Beggin' her not to throw me down. All that sinnin'. All that grime on my soul. All that hatred in my heart. But then I looked up and saw that She was smilin' down at me. She opened her mouth, and silence came out. But I heard her loud and clear. 'I got a special task for you and if you complete it, all your sins will be washed away.'

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I opened my file. And I saw my task was you. What could little old me, give to big old you? I thought you was gone be perfect. Well, you ain't, but then you are. You have the biggest heart I done ever knownt. You have the strength to love those who could never love you back. If I had just a small fraction of the love you have for this world, then maybe, just maybe I could become half the angel you are.

Long heavy beat.

King Will I die at the hands of a white man, too?

Beat.

Camae Yes. Speak by love. Die by hate.

King Where will it be?

Camae On the balcony just right there.

242

They look to the door of the room.

King How?

Camae Surrounded by those who love you.

King Will you be there to clean up the mess?

Camae It would be an honor, Preacher Kang.

King Will there be others after me? To carry on the baton?

Camae Many, many will carry it on, but there'll never be another you. You are a once-in-a-lifetime affair.

King Is the future as beautiful as you?

Camae Yes ... and it's as ugly as me, too.

King I wanna see it.

Camae I don't know if you could handle it. It might break your heart.

King My heart already weary, Camae. I wanna see it before I die.

Camae But I thought you done already seen the Promised Land?

King In my dreams, but I wanna see it with my eyes. My own eyes. If I see — *really* see it, I will die a happy man tomorrow. I will go willingly into your arms, Camae. If you just let me see these dreams I'll never ever see.

Beat.

A trembling King reaches out to Camae. She doesn't take his hand.

Camae I'll let you see, but when you're called back you'll have to come. I'ma have to take you on home tomorrow.

King What time shall I meet you?

Camae 6:01 p.m.

King Is it gonna hurt?

Camae You won't feel the hurt. The world will.

King *(teary eyed)* You promise?

Camae I promise. You ready?

King *nods, gulping back tears.*

Camae Let's take you to the mountaintop.

She walks up to him and kisses him. He becomes woozy in her arms. She stares at him. Lightning flickers as images from that fateful day, 4 April 1968, begin to seep through the hotel walls.

Camae The Prince of Peace. Shot.

His blood stains the concrete outside Room 306
A worker wipes away the blood but not before
Jesse baptizes his hands on the balcony
The baton passes on

More and more images of the American experience consume the walls as the hotel begins to disintegrate right before their very eyes.

Memphis burning
DC burning
Cities burning
Vietnam burning
Coffins coming home
Another Kennedy killed
The baton passes on

Bayard Rustin
Stonewall Riots
Andrew Young
Julian Bond
Bob Marley
Redemption Songs
Angela Davis

Assatta Shakur
 Afro picks
 Black raised fists
 Olympics
The baton passes on

244

*The images have picked up in speed and the hotel continues to float away It's almost as if
 King is surrounded by the images, walking through the future that he will never inhabit.*

Camae White children
 Black children
 Crayola-color children
 Together in a cafeteria

Roots
 The Jeffersons
 Sidney Poitier
 Superfly
 Isaac Hayes
 James Brown
 I'm black and I'm PROUD!
 Jesse for President
 I am Somebody!

Camae *begins to float away into another world. Another dimension. Her voice becoming an
 echo as the future continues to consume the stage.*

Camae Crips
 Bloods
 Blue
 Red
 White
 Crack
 Smack
 Marion Barry
 Tracks
 AIDS
 Reagan wins again

Berlin Walls
 Apartheid falls
 Robben Island sets Mandela free
 Rodney King screams:
 'Can't we all just get along?'
The baton passes on

245

No peace in the Middle East
 Ruby Dee
 'You sho'll is ugly!'
 Spike Lee
 Rwanda bleeds
 Bill Clinton
 Niggah please

Skinheads
 The Cosby Show
 Baby Mamas
 Soul Train
 Montelle
 Don't Ask Don't Tell

Run DMC
 BET
 MTV
 Walk this way
The baton passes on

And on and on
Till the break of dawn
For the American song
We shall overcome

A white Bronco flees into the night
If it doesn't fit, you must acquit

James Byrd
Columbine
Ron Brown
Colin Powell
Clarence Thomas

Tupac
Oprah
Biggie
Crack Corners
From Crenshaw
To MLK Boulevard

Saddam Hussein
Osama
George Bush
Condi Rice

The Towers sigh
The world turns gray
September 11th
One bright morning day

Katrina, Katrina
American as apple pie
Drove the Chevy to the levee
But the levee was drowned
The Superdome

Drive-bys
McDonald's
Diabetes
Iraq
NBA
High-paid slaves
The children of the Nile
A nuclear 8 Mile
Black picket fences
And Jena Six
American flags
And Black Presidents!!!

The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on

246

*The good, the bad and the ugly of America continue to proceed like a fluid mental freeway into the very edge of now and perhaps beyond. It's like a river with no levee and the images flood our senses, our minds, and our hearts. The sound and the fury of it all rises to a frenetic peak until BOOM! CRICKLE! CRICKLE-CRACK!! A flash of lightning illuminates the stage. And suddenly **King** stands in the deep dark blue of the blackness, trying to take his rightful place in the universe among the stars. He is looking over our heads. Past us, through us, floating above us in the silence.*

247

King (in utter amazement) What is this vision I see before me? Could this be my wildest dream? (Taking it all in.) There it is. There ... It ... Is

A land where hunger is no more. A land where war is no more. A land where richness is no more, poverty is no more, color is ... no more. Destruction ... is no more. Only love. Fierce radical love. The Promised Land here on Earth.

I accept. I will never walk through that blessed garden over yonder ... that lush land just on the far side of moon. It ... is ... so ...

King's mouth cannot articulate his dream. For one he is speechless ... He looks at his congregation from the mountaintop. With tears in his eyes, he gathers the strength to speak on.

Well ... nobody said it was gonna be easy. Nobody said it would happen in an instant. Everybody said we'd never get there. But then again nobody thought we'd make it this far. Can I get an Amen? I said can I get an Amen!

You have wandered the desert. The flaming sands burning your feet. But you are standing at the edge of Canaan on a mountaintop made of the dreams of men and women who have paid the ultimate price with their lives. Children of Nile you must rise, as you can no longer walk weary through this world with willowed backs. Your time is now, I tell you NOW!!

The baton may have been dropped. But anyone can pick it back up. I don't know where in the race we are, but pick up that baton and pass, pass, pass it along! This baton is no longer the burden my image can bear.

248

For, you are the climbers, the new carriers of the cross. I beg you, implore you, don't give in and toss it off. On this here mountaintop there is beauty to behold, the Promised Land your Promised Land in black, red, white, blue, brown and gold. Canaan is calling! She is calling for you to come!! The Promised Land is so close, and yet so far away, so close and yet so far away so close and yet so —

In a small pinpoint of light Camae's hand comes from behind King, settling on his trembling shoulder.

Camae Time.

Blackout.

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