

THE BOILING HOUSE

By Peter Snoad

Synopsis

It's the 20th anniversary of Mama Aida's guesthouse on a tiny Caribbean island, and the guests are throwing a surprise party for their much-loved host. The celebration turns sour when newcomer Elias Greene, a famous rapper, shows interest in the ruins of the old sugar mill nearby. Mama Aida suspects him of wanting to buy her land, originally acquired by her slave forebears and now prime real estate. She compels Elias to reveal the real reason for his visit: Research has convinced him that his ancestors were also slaves on the island, and he wants to establish a slavery memorial.

Their discussion is cut short, however, by news of a rapidly approaching hurricane. The guests prepare to evacuate to a larger island nearby. But engine problems with their boat leave them stranded. Over Mama Aida's strenuous objections, they seek refuge in The Boiling House, the one intact stone structure at the old mill site. It's a building that harbors a painful family secret: Mama Aida's great great grandparents were brutally tortured there after leading an unsuccessful slave rebellion. Venturing inside The Boiling House for the first time, Mama Aida feels the presence of her ancestors. And she hears sounds and sees visions from the past.

After surviving the hurricane, the group returns to the guesthouse to find it largely destroyed. Elias bankrolls its reconstruction and urges Mama Aida to make The Boiling House a memorial to the often overlooked history of slave resistance. Transformed by her encounter with her ancestors, Mama Aida fights to keep it a private sacred space where her ancestral spirits and the power of memory hold sway.

CHARACTERS: (Requires 2 women and 3 men with doubling)

MAMA AIDA*, guesthouse owner/manager, African-Caribbean, late 50's

JONNY WILLIAMS, her nephew; entrepreneur, African-Caribbean, 20's

HARRY BRAITHWAITE, retired coal miner, British, white, 60's

ELIAS "ALEEBYE" GREENE**, rap star, African-American, late 20's/early 30's

KATIE CHENG, software engineer, Asian-American, 30's

DINAH*, a female slave, African

CUFFEY**, a male slave, African

* Played by the same actor **Played by the same actor

SET: A single set. Most of the action of the play takes place in the lounge/bar of the guesthouse. A single scene in the Boiling House can be staged with little or no set change.

