

THE BOILING HOUSE

A play

by

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THE BOILING HOUSE

CHARACTERS

*Note: the cast is 2 women and 3 men. The actors playing Mama Aida and Elias Greene also play the roles of Dinah and Cuffey respectively.*

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, an enslaved woman, African  
CUFFEY, an enslaved man, African

TIME

The present

SETTING

A guesthouse on a small Caribbean island

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

In black. We hear a distant sound of African drumming. Gradually, it is overtaken by another sound: the radio broadcast of an English professional soccer game. It's a climactic moment, and the commentator's voice is frenzied.

COMMENTATOR'S VOICE

The referee looks at his watch. Only seconds left now. One last chance for Barnsley to win it in regulation. Oh, and a lovely ball out to Ecclestone on the right! Are we in for a fairytale finish? A goal here would put Barnsley in the final for the first time in fifty years. Here's the cross, low and hard into the box. It comes to Mackay, oh and he's got space, he turns, he shoots...!—

The radio goes dead as lights come up on the bar-lounge of MAMA AIDA'S guesthouse on a small Caribbean island. The room is simple and bright. There's a bar with stools and liquor bottles on shelves and some wicker tables and chairs. A packet of vegetable seeds is on the bar counter. A "House Rules" notice is pinned to one wall. Behind the bar is a doorway masked by hanging beads that leads to the unseen kitchen. Up center is a screen door that is the outside entrance to the bar-lounge. HARRY BRAITHWAITE sits with a glass of rum punch in his hand. He is crouched over a shortwave radio.

HARRY

(Banging on the radio)  
No. NO!

KATIE CHENG enters with a big basket of freshly cut flowers. She is a purposeful, rather intense woman. She is dismayed to see HARRY.

KATIE

(Rebuking him)  
Harry!

HARRY

I don't believe it, I don't bloody believe it.

KATIE

What are you doing here?

HARRY

Energizer fucking Bunny.

KATIE

(Gesturing to the garden outside)

You said you'd keep her occupied.

HARRY

I know, I know.

KATIE

Well go!

HARRY

(Rising and heading for the door)

All right, keep your hair on.

KATIE

The seeds?

HARRY

The seeds.

KATIE picks up the packet of vegetable seeds from the bar counter. She glances at it before handing it to him.

KATIE

Brussel sprouts?!

HARRY

(Taking the packet from her)

Food of the gods them.

KATIE

Brussels Sprouts do not grow in the Caribbean.

HARRY

She's a gardener. She likes a challenge.

KATIE

The idea was to distract her, buy some time—

HARRY

I know, I know—

KATIE

Christ! I need five minutes, that's all, five minutes.

HARRY

I'll do a striptease.

KATIE

GO!

He starts for the door, then turns and drains his glass of rum punch with a satisfied flourish.

NOW!

He exits. KATIE, all business, moves into action. She goes behind the bar and places three vases, already full of water, on the counter. She begins rapidly to arrange the flowers in the vases. Enter JONNY WILLIAMS carrying a cooler and a travel bag. He is lithe and boyishly handsome. He's a cheerful type, but there's a gentle wisdom about him that belies his youth.

JONNY

Hey Katie!

KATIE

There you are, thank God. She's still out in the garden—

JONNY

(Playfully)  
I got a surprise for you.

KATIE

(Preoccupied with arranging flowers)  
Really?

As if on cue, ELIAS GREENE enters. He wears shades, carries luggage. He is out of breath.

Our new guest.

JONNY

KATIE  
(Going to him and extending her hand)  
Hi, welcome, you must be Elias.

ELIAS  
How you doing?

KATIE  
I'm Katie Cheng, I'm a guest here, too.

ELIAS  
Cool.

KATIE  
It always gets you the first time.

ELIAS  
Excuse me?

KATIE  
The hill. It's steeper than it looks.

ELIAS  
Tell me about it. I thought this place was right on the beach.

KATIE  
Close enough.  
(Returning to her flowers)  
I'm sorry, I need to keep going here. Did Jonny tell you about the...?

ELIAS  
Yeah, yeah, he told me.

KATIE  
I hope you don't mind, I mean—

ELIAS  
Party is my middle name.

KATIE

Great. Jonny, have you got the—?

JONNY

(To KATIE)

You know who this is?

KATIE

What?

JONNY

(Indicating ELIAS)

This is the surprise.

KATIE looks puzzled.

JONNY

You don't recognize this guy?

KATIE

I don't know, should I...?

JONNY

Aleebye.

KATIE

Alibi?

JONNY

Real name Elias Greene, but—

KATIE

Omigod.

JONNY

I told you, big surprise.

KATIE

No shit. Wow. Well, I'm, er...I'm very pleased to meet you.

ELIAS

Likewise.

JONNY

The famous rapper come home to his roots! Like Herc and Bam and Flash.

ELIAS

Yeah, well—

JONNY

Oh man, your shit is tight, man. Soooo tight!

KATIE

Look, I hate to—

JONNY

How crazy is this, huh? The big star on our little island! And he come in my boat, MY boat!

KATIE

Jonny—

JONNY

I see him there on the dock, all alone, and I say, that guy there sure look like Aleebye, spitting image, but no, no, it can't be, no way. Where his people at, security, you know? But you don't fool me, man, with the shades and all, oh no, no, no. I recognize you anywhere, man, anywhere!

ELIAS shrugs. JONNY laughs.

ELIAS

(To KATIE)

What you doing here?

KATIE

Oh, just hanging out.

JONNY

She's a software engineer. Very successful. Got her own company.

ELIAS

Is that right?

KATIE

Boring, boring—

JONNY

But her real passion is birds.

ELIAS

Birds?

JONNY



We got a lot of songbirds migrate through here, all different kind.

KATIE

Jonny, did you—?

ELIAS

(Looking out over the bay, awestruck)

Man! Will you look at that!

JONNY

Yeah, paradise, man. Remember what I tell you, I got me connections on the big island, sweet connections, whatever your heart desire, man, I take care of it, okay?

KATIE

Jonny!

JONNY

What?

KATIE

Have you got the cake?

JONNY

Have I got the cake? 'Course I got the cake. And pencils for you, and batteries for Harry's radio, and dinner. Nice piece of blue marlin to go with Auntie's special callaloo.

KATIE

(Pointing to the cooler)

The fish is in there? With the cake?

JONNY

No problem, man, it all wrapped up.

KATIE

Well, take it to the kitchen, please. Hurry! They'll be here any minute.

JONNY

Okay. Relax, okay?

JONNY exits to the kitchen with the cooler.

KATIE

Elias, could you give me a hand?

ELIAS

Sure.

KATIE

There are cups and plates in the kitchen, and—

ELIAS

You got it.

Before ELIAS can comply, JONNY bursts through the doorway from the kitchen.

JONNY

They're coming! Quick, quick!  
(To ELIAS)  
Here, man, here! Get down!

They all crouch down behind the bar out of sight. A slight pause.

MAMA AIDA

(Offstage, approaching)  
Don't give me that nonsense. They only like cold and wet. You forget, I lived in England once.

HARRY

(Offstage)  
But see, they're very adaptable are Brussels sprouts—

MAMA AIDA

(As she enters)  
You said the same thing about rhubarb.....

Her voice trails off. She is stopped in her tracks by the floral display.

What is going on here?

JONNY, ELIAS and KATIE jump up from behind the bar.

JONNY, ELIAS, KATIE and HARRY

SURPRISE!

MAMA AIDA

Oh Lordy, you scare the hell out of me. What is this?

HARRY

I said she wouldn't remember.

MAMA AIDA

Barnsley won the big game.

HARRY

Maybe, I don't know, the radio died.

MAMA AIDA

Then what are we celebrating? Jonny?

JONNY smiles and shrugs in mock ignorance.

HARRY

Shame on you, love, forgetting your anniversary.

MAMA AIDA

Anniversary? What you talking about?

KATIE

Your twentieth.

MAMA AIDA

Twenty what?

HARRY

Go on, Jonny, put her out of her misery.

JONNY

Twenty years ago today you open this guesthouse.

MAMA AIDA

No, no, it's not possible, no.

JONNY

This very day.

MAMA AIDA

(Indicating JONNY)

How come my nephew know all about this, and I don't?

HARRY

Age, love. We forget things.

MAMA AIDA

You got that right.

HARRY

But you wear it well. Except for the crow's feet, the spare tire, and your varicose veins.

MAMA AIDA

Harry Braithwaite, you the rudest man I know!

KATIE beckons JONNY and they exit to the kitchen.

ELIAS

Mama Aida, I want to introduce myself. I'm Elias Greene.

MAMA AIDA

Ah, Mister Greene, welcome.

ELIAS

It's great to be here.

MAMA AIDA

You beat the storm. We got a storm coming.

ELIAS

I heard.

MAMA AIDA

It's that time of year. But it's quiet here off-season. One month ago this place was buzzing. Crazy! But they all up and gone now except Harry and Katie. And you.

ELIAS

Yeah, well, I'm looking forward to just chilling. You got a beautiful place here. I mean, I ain't never seen anything like this, this is amazing. The ocean, the flowers everywhere—that's your garden, right?

MAMA AIDA

My pride and joy.

ELIAS

Beautiful, man. Beautiful.

HARRY

(Offering his hand)  
I'm Harry Braithwaite by the way.

Hey, what's up?  
ELIAS

Jonny show you your cabin?  
MAMA AIDA

Not yet.  
ELIAS

Come with me.  
MAMA AIDA

But you got a party here.  
ELIAS

A big fuss for nothing.  
MAMA AIDA

What do you mean, love? It's a milestone.  
HARRY

Too many damn miles. Come.  
MAMA AIDA

Really, it's okay, no rush.  
ELIAS

As you wish.  
MAMA AIDA

You got family here?  
ELIAS

Just Jonny. My kids are all grown and gone. Scattered to the four winds.  
MAMA AIDA

Oh yeah?  
ELIAS

England and America.  
MAMA AIDA

Brixton, Birmingham and Brooklyn, where hurricanes hardly happen.  
HARRY

Excuse me? ELIAS

JONNY enters with the cake. Applause. KATIE follows with a tray of rum punches.

Bravo! HARRY

Is that what I think it is? MAMA AIDA

Chocolate with hazelnut cream filling. JONNY

From Melinda's? MAMA AIDA

Where else. JONNY

Oh, sinful!  
(She bursts out laughing) MAMA AIDA

(Escorting MAMA AIDA to her favorite chair)  
Here, love, let's get you situated. HARRY

JONNY cuts pieces of cake.

(Handing round the drinks)  
And we have tonic, too!  
(To ELIAS)  
Mama Aida's famous rum punch. KATIE

(To ELIAS)  
Put hairs on your chest, that will. Or in your ears if you're my age.  
(To MAMA AIDA, in a posh English voice)  
Your throne, ma'am. HARRY

(In a posh voice also)  
Thank you, my good man. But where is my crown? MAMA AIDA

HARRY

Allow me, ma'am.

HARRY takes a couple of flowers from a vase and puts them in her hair.

If I may say so, ma'am, you look delectable—

(Reverting to his regular Yorkshire accent)

Ooo, in't she a bloody knockout, eh? Move over Cleopatra. I propose a toast.

KATIE

A toast!

HARRY

But first, I'd like to say a few words.

JONNY

(Sarcastically)

A few?

Laughter.

HARRY

Now strictly speaking what we're celebrating today is this place. A haven for the happy few, and the best-kept secret in the whole bloody Caribbean. Twenty years it's been here, in all its unpretentious glory, catering to lucky bastards like us. And you know something? Every day I wake up and I pinch myself, I do—in all the right places—and I say to myself: Harry Braithwaite, you jammy bugger, what in God's name have you done to deserve this? It's so bloody beautiful it takes your breath away, the sun shines every day, guaranteed—and after twenty-seven years down pit I can't begin to tell you what that means, not to mention the fact that we don't have sun in South Yorkshire—

JONNY

(Imitating HARRY'S Yorkshire accent)

Only weather!

Laughter.

HARRY

Plus, we get fed like the bloody royals.

KATIE

(To ELIAS)

Her cooking is amazing.

HARRY

AND there are unlimited quantities of a certain tonic with exceptional medicinal qualities—

JONNY

(Imitating HARRY'S Yorkshire accent)

To which some folk I know are quite partial.

Laughter.

HARRY

BUT! But. Be that as it may, what we're really celebrating today is not a place but a person. A very special person.

(Looking at MAMA AIDA)

Every day, rain or shine, we are bathed in that radiant smile, that sunny disposition, that tender embrace. God knows how you put up with us, love, but you do. And you take care of us. And you make this feel like home.

(Raising his glass in a toast)

I give you Mama Aida, Queen of Sunshine!

ALL EXCEPT MAMA AIDA

Mama Aida, Queen of Sunshine!

KATIE

Time for cake.

HARRY

Not yet.

HARRY goes behind the bar and returns with a gift-wrapped package.

MAMA AIDA

Oh Lord, what you go do now?

KATIE

A little token of our appreciation.

HARRY

(Handing over the gift)

I'll give you a clue. It's a cookbook.

KATIE



Containing all his favorite dishes.

MAMA AIDA starts to remove the wrapping.

HARRY

One hundred recipes for Brussels sprouts.

JONNY

Not rhubarb?

HARRY

She should be so lucky.

The gift is revealed. It's a landscape painting with the nearby ruins of the old sugar mill in the background. MAMA AIDA looks at it. A slight pause.

Oh dear.

MAMA AIDA

No, no, it's good. It's very colorful. Who paint it?

KATIE

Gloria.

MAMA AIDA

Ah Gloria, yes, I see now, yes.

KATIE

(To ELIAS)

She was a guest here.

HARRY

I commissioned it on our behalf.

KATIE

Everyone loves that view from the top of the hill.

MAMA AIDA

Yes.

KATIE

We thought it would look great here.

(She takes the painting and holds it up against the wall.)

Or maybe a little further over...  
(She shifts it.)

ELIAS

(Pointing at the picture)  
That's the old sugar mill, right?

MAMA AIDA

You know about that?

ELIAS

I read about it.

KATIE

(As she holds up the picture)  
So? What do you think?

A slight, awkward pause.

HARRY

(To MAMA AIDA)  
It's okay, love, we're mortally offended but we'll get over it.

MAMA AIDA

No, no, no, I just think maybe it don't quite belong there.

JONNY

Too big.

KATIE

Really?

HARRY

Well, we don't have to decide now. As my Dad used to say, never make a major decision after three o'clock in the afternoon. Unless it involves drink or women. Now then—

ELIAS

I got something.

He crosses to his bags.

MAMA AIDA

Oh no, please.

Why not? This is a big deal.

ELIAS

For some people.

MAMA AIDA

He hands her a beautifully wrapped package.

MAMA AIDA

Thank you. You are very kind.

ELIAS

(To JONNY)  
And this is for you, man.

He hands JONNY a CD.

JONNY

(Excitedly)  
Oh man. Is this—?

ELIAS

Better than that. “Got Me My Aleebye”. Special limited edition.

JONNY

You serious?

ELIAS

Autographed.

JONNY

Oh man!  
(To MAMA AIDA)  
Auntie, Elias is a big rap star in America.

MAMA AIDA

(Unwrapping her gift)  
Oh yes?

ELIAS

(To JONNY)  
Collector’s item, only three hundred copies made.

Man, this is....thank you.

JONNY

(Looking at her gift)  
Oh my Lord.

MAMA AIDA

She holds up a large and exquisite piece of  
Kente cloth.

Kente.

That's from Ghana, the real thing. What the royalty wore.

ELIAS

He takes the cloth from MAMA AIDA and drapes it  
over her shoulders.

Wow.

KATIE

You the Queen now, Auntie. The Queen of Sunshine!

JONNY

MAMA AIDA is silent, stroking the cloth  
reverentially.

(Somberly)  
I don't know. I don't deserve it.

MAMA AIDA

She bursts out laughing. Everyone except  
HARRY laughs with her.

More tonic anyone?

HARRY

Yeah, this is a *royal* party.

ELIAS

And I gonna give you the royal tour, man.

JONNY

(To JONNY)

MAMA AIDA

Take him to his cabin first.

JONNY

And then the beach. You like to snorkel?

ELIAS

Oh yeah.

JONNY

We got the best snorkeling in the Caribbean right around here, man.

ELIAS

Cool. Oh, and I wanna see the boiling house.

MAMA AIDA

What you know about that?

ELIAS

Well, it's the one building in the old sugar mill that's still intact, right? Which I guess is kinda unusual 'cos most of the plantations, they made them old buildings into fancy inns and condos and stuff. Right?

(Beat. MAMA AIDA looks at him and says nothing.)

'Least, that's what I read.

MAMA AIDA

Where?

ELIAS

Some guidebook.

MAMA AIDA

And did this guidebook tell you who owns the old mill and the land round here?

ELIAS

Miss Aida Thompson, known to one and all as Mama Aida.

MAMA AIDA

And?

HARRY

How about we—?

MAMA AIDA raises her hand to silence HARRY.

ELIAS

Her ancestors were slaves, and they once worked on this very same plantation.

It ain't for sale.

MAMA AIDA

Excuse me?

ELIAS

I said, it ain't for sale.

MAMA AIDA

I wasn't—

ELIAS

You think I was born yesterday? I smell people like you.

MAMA AIDA

Auntie, please—

JONNY

Wait a minute. You think I want to buy this place?

ELIAS

What company you with? Huh? Cruise ship? Hotel chain? Eco-tourism?

MAMA AIDA

I'm not here for that.

ELIAS

The Heritage Commission! Oh Lord, I thought they gone as low as you can go, but this takes the biscuit. Sending an American to do their dirty work. Can you believe it?

MAMA AIDA

Mama Aida, I am not here to buy your house or your land or anything, I swear to God.

ELIAS

So why you here?

MAMA AIDA

He's on holiday.

JONNY

Sure. Cold showers and composting toilets just his style.

MAMA AIDA

Auntie—

JONNY

What else?

MAMA AIDA

Look, why don't we—

ELIAS

Tell me.

MAMA AIDA

And interrupt the party? Ma'am, where I come from, that is a crime.

ELIAS

You want to stay here, you tell me the truth or Jonny take you back on the boat right now.  
(Beat.)

MAMA AIDA

I think we should have ourselves a private conversation.

ELIAS

MAMA AIDA glares at him. A slight pause. He relents.

My ancestors were slaves on this island also.  
(Beat)

MAMA AIDA

It's not possible.

ELIAS

It's true.

MAMA AIDA

You are from America.

ELIAS

My Mom's West Indian, my Dad, too.

MAMA AIDA

They told you this story?

ELIAS

No.

MAMA AIDA

So how do you know?

ELIAS

I done research. I traced it back.

MAMA AIDA

You mean like the DNA thing?

ELIAS

On my Dad's side, I'm from Aflao, that's in Ghana, what is now Ghana, and my Mom, her people were from Sierra Leone. And then there's written records. The slave ships, the slave markets, the plantations, Maybe you get lucky and connect the dots.

MAMA AIDA

And you did?

ELIAS

I did.

MAMA AIDA

But you don't know you're from here, from *this* island.

ELIAS

This was the Grainger plantation. Owned by Archibald Grainger of Sussex, England. He bought slaves in the slave market in Spanish Town and shipped 'em here to work his sugar fields. One of them was a slave called Sam. He married a slave called Isabel. I am a direct descendant.

(Beat.)

MAMA AIDA

No.

ELIAS

Could be our people knew each other. Could be—

MAMA AIDA

Don't you jump to no more conclusions. Please.

ELIAS

Look, I know it seems crazy. I mean, if someone had said to me what I just said to you, I'd have been like, no way, man, I mean that is just fantasy, know what I'm saying?



Yes. MAMA AIDA

ELIAS  
But it happens. I mean, we all got this history, and you dig around, and suddenly, there it is, this is who I am, this is who you are.

MAMA AIDA  
What do you want, Mister Greene?

ELIAS  
I want one of your special rum tonics.

MAMA AIDA  
What have you come here for?

ELIAS  
To see for myself.

MAMA AIDA  
See what?

ELIAS  
This place, my history, the end of the rainbow, the beginning, I don't know. All of that.

MAMA AIDA  
What else?

HARRY  
Who wants cake? It's going begging.

MAMA AIDA  
What else?

ELIAS  
It's personal.

MAMA AIDA  
Not any more.

ELIAS  
One day I'm down in Inglewood mixing, you know, and this brother in the studio, we get to talking and he's like totally into black history and stuff and he gives me this book about slavery. And I read it and I'm like what? Four million Africans were brought to

these islands as slaves and worked them to death. Four million. And people don't know that, not in America they don't. Black folks don't know. And where are the memorials?

MAMA AIDA

We got memorials.

ELIAS

That big fancy museum on Guadeloupe? I mean, that's good, but local sites, like around there? You gotta search, man, you gotta play detective.

MAMA AIDA

So that's your game, huh?

ELIAS

It's not a game.

MAMA AIDA

You build a slavery memorial here, you do it over my dead body.

The cell phone behind the bar rings. JONNY goes to answer it.

JONNY

(To MAMA AIDA, holding up the phone)

It's Mildred.

MAMA AIDA

I call her later.

JONNY

It's urgent.

MAMA AIDA takes the phone.

HARRY

(To JONNY)

What is it?

JONNY

The storm.

HARRY

What about it?

JONNY

It's now a hurricane.

Seriously?	ELIAS
Oh God.	HARRY
How's it tracking?	KATIE
We're right on it, dead center.	JONNY
Whoa.	KATIE
Shit.	ELIAS
And it's moving fast.	JONNY
How long before it gets here?	HARRY
Forty-eight hours. Maybe less.	JONNY
	Lights fade.

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

The same, the next morning. MAMA AIDA is packing glasses, liquor bottles and other items into boxes. The shelves behind the bar are nearly empty. Other boxes, already packed, are piled to one side. MAMA AIDA is singing quietly to herself. HARRY enters, carrying a bulging bag.

HARRY

(Putting down the bag)

It's amazing what you accumulate living the simple life. Can I help, love?

MAMA AIDA

No thank you.

HARRY

So what do you reckon?

MAMA AIDA

What?

HARRY

You think this place'll still be standing when we get back?

MAMA AIDA

I ain't going nowhere.

HARRY

What?

MAMA AIDA

You heard me.

HARRY

Don't be bloody daft, love, it's a hurricane.

MAMA AIDA

They don't know for sure.

HARRY

It's official. It's a Category Three.

MAMA AIDA

Twenty years I live here, and we never have one hurricane. Not one.

HARRY

Well, this'll be your first.

MAMA

I'm staying here.

HARRY

You can't, yer daft pillock, you'll die.

MAMA AIDA does not respond. She continues to pack boxes.

So what's all this then?

MAMA AIDA

Normal precautions for a storm.

HARRY

It's that lad, in't it?

MAMA AIDA

It got nothing to do with him.

HARRY

Listen to me. He can't build a memorial in the middle of a hurricane.

MAMA AIDA

Memorials! You think I worry about that?

HARRY

And he's coming on the boat to the big island with the rest of us. Including you.

MAMA AIDA

(With sudden passion)

Why can't they leave us alone?

HARRY

I know, love, I know.

MAMA AIDA

I tell them 'til I'm blue in the face.

HARRY

(Peering at her face)  
Blue....I don't see any blue.

MAMA AIDA

He should go to Jamaica. They got all kind of memorials. Nanny of the Maroons is right there in the park in Kingston.

HARRY

Aida—

MAMA AIDA

Or Barbados, the Emancipation statue. He could make a replica. Put it next to his swimming pool in Hollywood.

HARRY

Aye, he's got more money than sense, that's for sure. But—

MAMA AIDA

No.

HARRY

I'm not leaving without you.

MAMA AIDA

Go.

HARRY doesn't move.

Go on. I got things to do.

HARRY

You're coming with me.

MAMA AIDA

(Continuing to pack)  
Go!

HARRY

What am I supposed to do with you, Aida Thompson? Eh? Pick you up and carry you?  
(Beat. She ignores him.)

Right then, chocks away.

HARRY clasps his hands around MAMA AIDA and starts to lift her up. She pushes him away.

MAMA AIDA

Get off me! What do you think you're doing?

HARRY

Come on, love, I was just—

MAMA AIDA

No! We agreed. We made an agreement.

HARRY

Aye—

MAMA AIDA

It was a mistake.

HARRY

We did not agree it was a mistake.

MAMA AIDA

Never to be repeated.  
(Beat.)

HARRY

I'm sorry. I'm doing my best.

MAMA AIDA

Well, it's not good enough.

HARRY

I know. It's just that I look at you....

MAMA AIDA

You want to stay in my house, you control yourself.

HARRY

I will, I promise. But it won't matter a damn either way if Hurricane Marco blasts you halfway to the back of beyond. And it will, you know, it could wipe this whole island off the map. Get your gear together, we're leaving in half an hour.

He turns to leave but stops as ELIAS enters.

ELIAS

(Holding up his cell phone)  
There's no service. Can you believe that?

HARRY

It's the storm.

ELIAS

Mama Aida, I wanna apologize for yesterday, I got a little carried away. I'm sorry.

(Beat. She still looks at him, unforgiving and suspicious.)

Look, when this is all over, maybe we can like just sit down and talk? 'Cos this history we have in common, I mean, you gotta admit, it is kinda fascinating.

MAMA AIDA ignores him. KATIE enters with her bags.

HARRY

(To KATIE, indicating MAMA AIDA)

Can you talk some sense into this woman? She won't leave.

KATIE

Mama Aida, this is a tiny island, we are super vulnerable here. We have to evacuate.

JONNY enters, looking somber.

JONNY

We got a problem.

ELIAS

What?

JONNY

Engine trouble.

KATIE

What is it?

JONNY

The crankshaft.

KATIE

You've fixed it before.

JONNY

Not this time. It's shot.

HARRY

And you don't have a spare one lying around?

JONNY



Not here. There's one on the big island.

ELIAS

What we gonna do?

MAMA AIDA

Relax and stay cool, that's what we do. 'Course, we gonna have to replace Harry's cabin again, right, Jonny?

JONNY

Yeah, that one always fly away in a big storm.

MAMA AIDA

Cabin in the sky!

JONNY

And we always build another one in exactly the same spot.

MAMA AIDA

So stupid.

JONNY

Yeah, but we got no choice.

MAMA AIDA

The view....

JONNY and MAMA AIDA

Is too damn perfect!

They laugh hysterically.

ELIAS

So what is the plan?

MAMA AIDA

Plan?

ELIAS

You're not saying we stay here? We can't stay here.

MAMA AIDA

It's just a storm.

KATIE

It's a hurricane. Let's be real here.

(Beat.)

My birds are smart. They don't stick around for hurricane season. They fly north for three thousand miles and make babies.

HARRY

Too bad we don't have wings.

KATIE

So what are our choices?

ELIAS

We get another boat.

KATIE

Where from?

ELIAS

The neighbors?

KATIE

We don't have neighbors.

JONNY

There are only two other houses on this island. Rich people from Europe.

KATIE

And they have boats?

JONNY

It's off-season. They don't keep 'em here.

ELIAS

Who else has a boat?

KATIE

Jonny?

ELIAS

Yeah, man, you got all the connections.

JONNY

It won't do no good.

ELIAS

What do you mean?

JONNY

They won't come from the big island, not now. Too risky.

KATIE

The storm won't be here until tomorrow.

JONNY

Moving this fast, it come any time. And if you out there, man, that's it.

KATIE

You were going to take us.

JONNY

'Cos we ain't got no choice.

ELIAS

How much we talking about?

JONNY

It's not the money, man.

ELIAS

Two grand? Three grand? You telling me there ain't no one out there with a boat who could use that kind of money for a couple of hours' work?

JONNY

And survive to spend it?

ELIAS

What about the government?

HARRY

They have helicopters.

KATIE

The base, of course!

ELIAS

Base?

KATIE

The American base on the big island. The Air National Guard.

ELIAS

We can't call 'em anyway. We can't call anyone.

MAMA AIDA

Okay, listen to me, all of you. What we gonna do now, we gonna calm down. And I say it again in case you don't understand me the first time: We are safe here. Safe as houses. We got food, water, sleeping mats, first aid, everything we need. What we don't have right now is fun. Look at you, all your long faces! This is the Caribbean, man, we don't let nothing get us down. Relax, dance, listen to Harry's dirty jokes. Drink a little tonic. Jonny, get the paper cups. Who want tonic?

(A pause.)

HARRY

Well, if you insist, love. I can think of worse ways to go.

MAMA AIDA

You don't get no tonic if you say things like that.

She starts to make the tonic. Beat.

KATIE

There must be other options.

MAMA AIDA

Lord save us! What is the matter with you?

JONNY

Auntie—

MAMA AIDA

I got some experience with this, girlie. Only twenty years, mind, but it count for something.

KATIE

My girlfriend lost a house to Katrina, and it was seriously built. No disrespect, Mama Aida, this is a beautiful old house, but it will be gone like that—

(She snaps her finger)

Like a leaf in the wind.

ELIAS

The boiling house.

KATIE

What?

HARRY

Solid stone. It's lasted two hundred years for a reason.

ELIAS

How far is it?

KATIE

A half-hour walk.

MAMA AIDA

You can not go in the boiling house. You know the rule.

KATIE

Yes, but this is—

ELIAS

Rule? What you talking about?

MAMA AIDA indicates the "House Rules" notice posted on the wall.

(Reading the notice)

"Guests are welcome to visit the ruins of the old sugar mill but are not permitted in the boiling house under any circumstances." Why not?

MAMA AIDA

It don't concern you.

ELIAS

It concerns everyone.

KATIE

Mama Aida, this is a life and death situation.

ELIAS

Is it like a safety issue? I mean, is the roof bad or something?

MAMA AIDA

The boiling house is out of bounds, that's it.

ELIAS

I ain't dying for some stupid house rule.

HARRY

You mind your manners, lad.

ELIAS

Excuse me?

HARRY

You heard me. Show some respect.

ELIAS

What you talking about, man? I'm just asking how come—

JONNY

Hey, man, let's be cool, okay?

HARRY

If Mama Aida doesn't want us in the boiling house, that's her business. We'll have to think of something else.

ELIAS

Yeah, like what?

(To MAMA AIDA)

Mama Aida. Our lives are on the line here.

MAMA AIDA is silent.

KATIE

It's our best chance. Maybe our only chance.

(Beat.)

ELIAS

Okay, that's it, we gotta—

HARRY

Hold on.

(To MAMA AIDA)

Aida, love, what is it?

(A pause. No response.)

KATIE

I'll pack some food.

ELIAS

And water!

HARRY

(To MAMA AIDA)

What is it, love? Tell me.

KATIE

We have a couple of flashlights. Where's the first aid kit? Jonny?

JONNY

In the kitchen, the closet next to the sink.

(To MAMA AIDA)

Auntie, don't worry now. It will be okay.

HARRY

(To MAMA AIDA)

What can I get you? Can I get you something?

KATIE

Mama Aida, maybe you and I can do the food thing together since you know where everything is.

MAMA AIDA is silent.

No problem, I'll figure it out.

MAMA AIDA

I made a promise to my father.

HARRY

What did you promise?

MAMA AIDA

No one will enter the boiling house.

HARRY

But why?

MAMA AIDA does not respond.

ELIAS

We have gotta get out of here.

HARRY stops him with a raised hand.

HARRY

(To MAMA AIDA)

Did he say Why?

JONNY

Auntie, he will understand.

MAMA AIDA turns away. She is in emotional distress. A slight pause.  
ELIAS shoulders his backpack.

JONNY

(Putting an arm around MAMA AIDA's shoulder)  
I'm sorry, but we have to do this.

Lights fade.