

“J’OUVERT”

AUDITION SCRIPTS

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NADINE- MONOLOGUE

Darkness. A stream of chocolate pours onto the stage. NADINE's silhouette appears beneath it, she smothers her limbs, her features are obscured. After some time...

NADINE. Do you feel free?

The distant sound of carnival revellers.

Do you feel free?

Beat.

When you wake up in the morning and pull your hair tight to hide the strays. Choke yourself up to the chin in nylon. Squeeze your foot and feel the crunch of those hard soles, do you feel free?

Beat.

I'm asking, do you feel free? Because I see you looking at me. Half in awe, half in disgust, more worried for me than I am for myself... But does watching me make you free?

Beat.

Because you see me? I'm on top of the world. Can't feel my tongue. Can't remember yesterday. Can't see tomorrow. I'm here. I'm now. I'm that finger on the pulse. Horns. And when I think of Freedom. I think of the taste of its sweet revenge. Thick and smooth like honey as it slips down our throats, quenching the anger of our ancestors and swallowing their cries. We're here because everything else was taken. What was broken in spirit, we revived with song.

She smothers herself more ferociously with chocolate.

J'Ouvert.

We race to beat the sun.

Beat.

Our muddied limbs obscure "he" from "she" and force our heirs and graces onto the ground.

Beat.

Bodies tingling with anticipation, limbs, faces, torsos, smeared with chocolate, some with oil, others shaking loose the empty bags of coloured powder. Waiting to exhale to the soothing thud of Soca. Every year the barriers get closer and tighter. The roads narrower and smaller. Police bigger and angrier. And we release... Release the pain. Release the anger. Release the laughter. Release!

A surge of energy pushes against her, she forces back.

RELEASE!

NADINE & JADE (transitions)

JADE. Over there.

Beat.

I hate to see that, man... Girls wuckin up on police, like they can't just lock them up when the dance done.

NADINE. Woiiii. Gareth is eating rice and peas tonight... Look at how red them cheeks are!

JADE. I beg you don't talk about rice and peas.

NADINE. Check him though, all like "That's enough thank you. Move along." You love it Gareth! Nasty!

The women continue to dance with their partners until things draw to a natural close. Something to signal a friendly goodbye. Shift. They change direction.

NADINE. Friendly drunks to the left. They try not to make eye contact.

JADE. Millwall on a day out.

NADINE. Where the hell did he get a pint glass?

We hear the sounds of a rowdy mob. JADE and NADINE are swept into a chant. They become LAD ONE and LAD TWO.

JADE / LAD ONE and NADINE / LAD TWO. OLEEEEE OLEEEE OLEEEEE OLEEEEE!

JADE / LAD ONE. "Not being funny right but you two look fucking stunning."

NADINE / LAD TWO. "Proper tropical."

JADE / LAD ONE. "Ask my mate. I love Black women."

NADINE / LAD TWO. "He does. He loves Black women." JADE / LAD ONE. "Best cooks. Best bodies. Love reggae..."

Beat

NADINE / LAD TWO. "Can we get a cheeky pic? No... What about a peck on the cheek?"

They laugh.

JADE / LAD ONE and NADINE / LAD TWO. OLEEEEE OLEEEE OLEEEEE OLEEEEE!

Shift.

JADE. Ugh. I got beer on my fuckin leg.

NADINE. We'll get tissues.

JADE. Your arm's starting to look like a spare rib.

NADINE. Not far babe. Hang in there. Beat.

JADE. Hope Nish found the spot okay.

NADINE. When those girls move, cut through.

JADE. Ain't she from that show?

Shift. NADINE becomes a cheesy reporter. JADE poses as the reluctant interviewee.

NADINE / REPORTER. "I'm Veronica May, reporting live from Carnival with Rap on The Go. I'm here talking to some of the sexiest tings here in Notting Hill. What's your name babe and where you from?"

JADE / INTERVIEWEE. "My name's Samantha and I'm from Clapton."

NADINE / REPORTER. "Shout out all the East London girls!"

They cheer awkwardly.

"So Samantha. How many numbers did you come to get today? What's your target?"

Shift.

NADINE. Love her man. She's got a podcast too, I listen to it in the nail shop!

JADE. If she comes over here with that mic.

JADE finding this deliciously funny.

Oh shit! Those little boys are about to hijack her interview.

Shift. They become teenage boys. Pushing, jostling and shoving to give the illusion that there's lots of them fighting for room to be seen.

JADE / TEEN ONE. "Notting Hill. With the mandem. Summer time. Say nothing!"

NADINE / TEEN TWO. "Excuse me miss... you got a second?"

JADE / TEEN ONE. "Fed tried search us, but today aint the day! Got my draw in my balls. No weapons officer. Sorry. Run along. Oink oink."

NADINE / TEEN TWO. "Obviously... man's got a baby face, but don't let that fool you... I'm 36."

JADE / TEEN ONE. "Got the gang here. Couple magnums. A few darlings..."

NADINE / TEEN TWO. "What about your friend. Nah not her, the light skin one. She single?"

JADE / TEEN ONE. "It's about to be a movie!"

NADINE & JADE

They look for somewhere comfortable to sit and eat. They settle for a stoop not too far from Milly's stall, but closer to music. We feel the energy of passers by.

NADINE. His hands lightly usher my hips away.

Beat. NADINE enjoys his guidance.

In a world of swipes and ticks. Profiles and pixels. Carnival is flesh.

JADE. I keep the air between us.

NADINE. Carnival is body.

JADE. It helps me breathe.

NADINE. Carnival is touch.

JADE. Mini Me hands me a napkin, his stubby fingers brush against mine. I think about leprosy.

NADINE. I look up and inspect the stories sitting in his skin... Lostness tucked behind deep brown eyes and... fear... fear tied neatly into a handsome smile.

Beat.

How did you get this scar?

NADINE reaches out.

He flinches...

JADE. [*Under MINI ME's constant gaze.*] Well this is awkward.

NADINE. "Nothing for you to worry about beautiful."

JADE. Are you just gonna keep staring at me?

NADINE. His eyes circle the floor again.

JADE stares blankly at plate on sin in her hands.

JADE. "So mean girl... you gonna let me have a bite?"

NADINE. Jade does NOT share food.

JADE. "A bite of you I mean. "

NADINE. I signal to Block Face to rein his mate in. He laughs and shrugs apologetically.

JADE. Well... I usually request a little more than flavourless Snapper in exchange for pussy-

NADINE. She's off.

JADE. -But I can give you the plate though. On your head if you like.

NADINE. Damage control... She's joking.

JADE. I stop talking. I can see winding me up is getting him stiff in his Age 10-12 midget jeans.

NADINE. "Excuse my boy, he's just a bit waved... But what, I can't get to know you, nah?"

JADE. *[No longer with them.]* The clouds look nice.

NADINE. What do you wanna know?

Beat.

He lightly holds my chin.

Pause.

I'm not into people touching my face, it introduces germs to your pores and I'm in a really good place with my skin... but the way he does it seems pure. Like he wants to see me. Really see me. "You're the prettiest girl here."

NADINE smiles and for a moment her tail wags like an arrogant cat. Beat. They take a few bites of their food. NADINE attempts to hide her repulsion, JADE doesn't.

JADE. "So back to what I was saying... big things really do come in little packages..."

Beat.

A drunk dude with glitter on his torso walks by talking loud with his boys. He gives us the drunken salute. A welcomed distraction. "Looking sexy girls!" I give him a thumbs up.

JADE signals some kind of friendly acknowledgment.

NADINE. The comment washes over me like a wave. And hits them like crashing rocks.

Shift. Pace.

NADINE. Blockface steps forward and shifts his weight from foot to foot. The clumsy stance of a bad fighter.

JADE. Mini-me grows in height from the indignation.

NADINE. "Do I look like a dickhead?" Angry spit in the creases of his mouth.

JADE. From below and then above, Mini-me's hands extend and clamp around Glitter Boy's neck.

NADINE. "You can't see us here fucking talking?"

JADE. The light behind Glitter Boys eyes vanish.

NADINE. "So when you see a man talking, that's the time you choose to be a Casanova?"

Beat.

JADE. Glitter boy says nothing. Just pants.

NADINE. "Say it again. I said say it again"

JADE. And pants.

NADINE. You lot please, he didn't mean it.

JADE. And pants.

NADINE. "Don't get yourself hurt."

Beat.

Eyes start burning holes.

JADE. [*Gasping.*] "I said... they were... sexy..."

NADINE. "Yeah... you did."

JADE. Mini-me doesn't loosen his hold.

NADINE. "And I take that as a disrespect."

Beat.

JADE. Glitter boy's friends aint the fighting type.

NADINE. His shadow swallows me.

JADE. Milly shouts out-

NADINE. "NOT BY MY STALL!"

JADE. "Tell these girls you're sorry."

NADINE. Guy's that not necessary.

JADE. "Did you hear what I said?"

NADINE. He can't breathe.

JADE. [*Gasping.*] "I'm... sorry."

NADINE. "I can't hear you."

JADE. [*Gasping.*] "I'm... sorry."

NADINE. "Now tell me you're sorry."

JADE. [*Gasping.*] "I'm... sorry."

NADINE & JADE (As CHARLES & HUBERT) + NISHA

HUBERT. [*Inspecting NISHA and addressing CHARLES.*] Every year these children have on less and less. Mi see one likkle girl with one piece of wire wedge up in her batty.

CHARLES. Well boy, these are the times.

HUBERT. When pneumonia come and cetch them backside.

NISHA. Something's in the air today.

Beat.

It's like nothing fits.

HUBERT sees something in NISHA that needs healing. He hands her some more bread and butters it this time. NISHA receives it with a smile and takes small bites.

Do you ever feel like you don't belong?

HUBERT finds the question strange and laughs to himself.

Not just here. Anywhere?

Beat.

HUBERT. What is belonging to you?

NISHA. I don't know... Feeling at home.

HUBERT. And where is home?

NISHA doesn't have an answer.

Home is beneath your skin. Never look fi home in one place. It's a recipe fi heartbreak.

CHARLES. Hubert, just because it was that way for us doesn't mean it has to be for the children nuh?

HUBERT. We had homes, and when we go back what do them call us? English. We come here and them do us worse. Look at what them did Kelso?

NISHA. Who's Kelso?

HUBERT. Kelso Cochrane.

CHARLES. Hubert, why must we burden the child with the past?

HUBERT. The present is dust without di past.

NISHA. No, please I want to hear.

CHARLES. [*Pleadingly.*] Let sleeping dogs lie.

Beat.

HUBERT. [*These words come from somewhere very deep within.*] Nothing to know child, just a black man from di islands living an honest life foolishly thinking this country was him home. Working and saving and believing a black man at that time could afford to have dreams.

Until them catch him walkin, minding his business on these very streets and with every piercing from that knife ripped hope from inside every one of our hearts.

Pause.

CHARLES. Oh. Notting hill was an angry place at that time. 1958-

HUBERT. -It was 1959.

CHARLES thinks about it, HUBERT is correct.

CHARLES. Yes. 1959.

NISHA. I think I read about it.

CHARLES. Child, there's reading and there's seeing. No book can tell you what we saw.

Beat.

Dark times like these were why a remarkable woman from the islands finally said "No...No. It's not struggle my people just exist to struggle, let them see joy." And that is how carnival was born.

Pause. NISHA sinks into the warm slowness of the old men's company. Suddenly...

NISHA. [*With an inflated chest. Hoping to impress.*] I'm part of a local political movement.

HUBERT. [*Feeling suddenly under threat.*] Don't badda come and talk to me bout no TV license. Mi nephew did email dem already!

NISHA. -No... No. We're not interested in stuff like that.

CHARLES does something to signify that HUBERT is losing his marbles.

CHARLES. Go on...

NISHA. Well... we're called West London Rising. We're a collective of young voices from across the borough trying to decolonise local policies and dismantle beaurocratic systems that affect the safety of the people. And erm... recently we... got badges.

HUBERT and CHARLES can't quite match NISHA's enthusiasm.

CHARLES. Very nice.

NISHA. We're giving them out today.

CHARLES smiles. HUBERT looks at NISHA as though she were from another planet.

I move a lot, see. Went to different schools around the country. Dragged left and right every time my Dad got a new job. But something about around here sticks... It's all those things you talk about. The way people come together after something awful. The history. The integrity of the people who built this place up and refuse to be moved.

HUBERT nods. He likes that point.

HUBERT. You from one of the estates?

NISHA. -No. Holland Park.

HUBERT and CHARLES register that they're in the presence of someone posh. For a moment the music gets loud and NISHA has to shout over it.

But...but... when I found the group, it was nothing but a bunch of spoiled White kids. Polly's and Otto's thinking they were radical socialists because their jeans were dirty...

HUBERT interrupts offering NISHA a beer. She declines.

I didn't wanna be a part of that.

Beat.

So I scouted. And canvassed. On my own mostly at first. Knocking on doors in every block. Every evening. Sometimes getting called names, sometimes getting told to fuck off, other times getting invited in for a cup of tea out of pity.

Beat.

And that's how I met my friend Jade

NADINE, JADE & NISHA

NISHA. All I want to do is be here for Jade, Nadine.

NADINE. And yet somehow it always ends up being about you.

Beat.

NISHA. Jade has been working really hard... Really hard... She's becoming the leader that lots of people around here need. I just don't wanna see her throw it all away.

Beat.

This speech-

NADINE. [Boiling point.] Oh my GOD. The speech... The speech!

NADINE steps up on her imaginary soapbox and makes a grandiose gesture.

The mother... fucking speech!

JADE. How can you have a problem with my speech when you didn't even have the fucking guts to finish your routine?

Beat. These words cut NADINE. She tries not to show it.

NADINE. My problem... is her. Carnival Queen slash Queer activist today, astronaut tomorrow and you're the one that get's left behind.

Beat.

NISHA. Unbelievable.

JADE. Nice... Real Nice Nadz. So what, I can't do something that matters? Good enough to jump up with, but not smart enough to make change? Why's she gotta be forcing me? Why can't this just be something that I chose? Something that I'm fucking good at.

NISHA. You hate to see her grow don't you?

NADINE. There's history there that you didn't know. There's history here that you don't know. Sometimes the most respectful and supportive thing you can do is sit back.

NISHA. You're from South London.

NADINE. These are still my people.

Beat.

NISHA. [*Throughout this speech NISHA begins to unravel.*] You know you're half right. We do have our differences. I went to a stuck up school, with stuck up Asian parents, I didn't see the things you guys saw. But I stood out in my world too. My life was far from easy and I'm not fucking stupid.

Beat.

I know what it is to have your history smudged out. I know what it is to not fit in where you were born. I know why this country houses Black and Brown kids above the fourth floor. I know that when undocumented immigrants die they never existed.

Beat.

I may not have been around here my whole life, but that day and every day since- nothing else mattered. None. Of. This. Matters. It's all about facts-Fuck how I feel. How you feel. Think about her- on her doorstep. Her community - Babies... Babies. Flying from the windows of their homes because they weren't born rich.

NADINE. [*Stern.*] This isn't fair on her.

NISHA. Jade needs support. Jade needs love.

NADINE. Jade needs her family.

NISHA. Jade can be what she wants.

DJ

DJ. IF YUH A REAL CARNIVAL VETERAN AND RAIN DON'T FRAID YUH - PUT UP UNNUH RIGHT HAND!

DJ. IF YUH HERE WID YUH LONG TIME FREN PUT UP UNNUH RIGHT HAND!

DJ. IF YUH WAN FREE UP YUSELF AND HAVE A GOOD TIME PUT UP UNNUH RIGHT HAND

DJ. WOIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII. BIG TIME POLITICIAN DAT! TOO MANY BADMIND PEOPLE DEM COME TRY MASH UP DI TING AND WE CAN'T MEK THAT HAPPEN. A FUNERAL OR A PARTY DIS? RUN DI TRACK!

DJ. MI GWAN TEK IT UP A NOTCH. FIVE MINUTES LEF TO MOVE YUH BODY AN MI AH GO USE UP EVERY LAST DROP. MI WAAN SEE ALL DI GYAL WHO CAME CARNIVAL TO GWAN BAD AND CYAN BE STOPPED!

JADE-MONOLOGUE/SPEECH

JADE. Who here is fucking tired?

Beat.

Exhausted?

Beat.

Sick to their core of being poked and prodded like a caged animal?

Beat.

Well guess what? Today is the day we bite.

Beat. NADINE and NISHA look on in awe.

See those boys didn't know they're outnumbered. They didn't know that when our people take to these streets in millions every year, they're the anomaly. They're the odd ones out. Because year after year it's antics like theirs that get to hijack the power, the press, that get to smudge out our hard work. Well not today. The crowd cheers. Today I had to fight, we had to fight, because in a space loved by us. Nurtured by us. Continued by us. Girls like me and my friends are still expected to beg to be heard.

Beat.

Beg for room. Beg not to be touched.

Beat.

But nah... my mum didn't raise a beggar.

Beat.

Any man disrespects my body or the body of a woman around me just coz she wants to dance or dress up nice, I'll tump him again!

Beat. The crowd loves this.

Look at us. Look at what we're dancing in the shadow of. Look at the circumstances we're forced to rise up against. And people think we can be stopped?

Beat.

I work in a bookies. William Hill in Shepherds Bush. In a regular week the most interesting thing to happen to me is the wrong horse getting lucky. I'm not special. I'm not remarkable. But my life is worth more than anything you can place a bet on and I'm willing to fucking fight for that.

Beat.

I joined a group called West London Rising, because I'm sick of people speaking for me. Speaking over me. It's time for people to shut up and fucking listen. We can't wait for this borough, for these people with their moats and bridges to tell us when we get respect. To tell us when or how to make noise or how to package our pain so it aint dripping on their marble floors.

Beat. Energy grows.

This shit.

JADE indicates to the world around them.

All of this around us. It's ours... not even to take, but to keep.

Beat.

They cheer in agreement. Every time we touch these streets it's resistance.

Beat.

We need to keep that energy with us. Take it anywhere where they wanna deny we exist.
We need to keep this shit breathing.

Beat.

Carnival is community. Protect each other. Protect what we've built

Beat.

I need you all to take that spirit home with you. I need you to fight with me. For us.

Beat.

Let's fuck shit up!