



Living In the Light & B4T (before testosterone)

Written and Performed by Imani Henry
Directed by Renita Martin

Act 3: The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006

This is the combination of two full-length multi-media shows excerpted and re-scripted for the *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* performance.

SET

There is an unmade bed upstage center jutting towards the right and an open screen directly in the center of back wall for projections. There are 3 baskets on the floor hidden from audience.

Scene 1: Happy Black Moment

VIDEO

February 2004 Brooklyn, NY: After the illegal US led “coup-napping” of Haiti’s President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Haitian people protest and rally in NYC. Video ends with music and chanting “George Bush! Liar!”

Imani is dressed in white shirt and white pants. He quietly walks and interacts with the audience during video.

VIDEO OUT: (Lights only on center stage: Imani stands center stage: lines to the audience)

Do you ever just get happy?

Look around you and just start smiling.

At people **(singles out audience member)** At Your people

For me ...Black people.

It’s Ok; you don’t have to be embarrassed.

I call it having a happy Black moment.

When I was child I would lay up at night, thinking, scared,
What if I wasn't born Black?
What if I wasn't Jamaican?
What? Who would I be?
Couldn't imagine it. Didn't want to.
But do you ever catch yourself staring at Black people?

Just focused on them. **(Pans the room/gets more animated)**

Say you're riding on a bus and maybe there's an elder woman.
(Pantomimes bus ride)

And you can see all lines and the wrinkles in her face.
And there's no make-up. Just skin, clear, regal. A Wise face.
Gleaming all her knowledge, pain, disgust outward.
Like she's trying to tell you her story, about herself but if she knew you well
enough she would say it with words. **(Turns left)**

A story long and hard, about living a lifetime and then some.

You understand what I talking about, right?

(More animated & playful with the audience)

Or maybe it's a child.
Let's say a girl child. A little Black child.

(Stops to deliver with a wink) I remember when I was a little Black girl child.

And say she's too young for a perm or extensions, so she's got natural little girl
hair. And she got it braided or in plaits as my grandma would call them.

2 braids, one part down the middle. Maybe she's Haitian, or Jamaican and she
got three parts. And ribbons, big ass ribbons, plaid, floral, its Sunday they match
her dress. Or they got those bunny plastic barrettes, clipped to the bottom.
**(He begins to pass out various hair accessories from the bowls to audience,
as he describes them).** And they hang free with one of those colored ball elastic

doohickey attached to her head.

Now you know she had to sit between her mother's knees and to get her hair dragged out with a comb to get that hair braided.

Or maybe it's the summer time, and she got beads, or cornrows, or extensions, so she can go swimming or just sweat.

I know you remember?

But do you know what's amazing? Do you know what's mind-blowing to?

Is that when that Black woman and that little Black girl got up this morning neither of them knew that they were braiding, corn rowing, that hair in the exact same style that a some African woman did centuries ago.

Do you understand what I saying? **(Excited but said very matter of factly)**

Over 400 years ago, somewhere in West Africa, there was a woman braiding her daughter's hair.

And then they were kidnapped, **(pantomimes scene as he speaks)**

Stripped and chained and put on a ship.

Women on the decks rocking talking in some African language.

In Ibo or Yoruba whispering into somebody's child ear,

(In the voice of African woman)

"It's ALRIGHT baby! We're gonna make it through.

Hold on to me baby! We're gonna make it through."

What if she was lying?

And through what?

Where were they going?

What was on the other side?

She didn't know nothing about disease, hunger, torture.

She didn't know nothing about death.

Then you land. In Cuba, Jamaica, Mississippi

Still shackled, put up on the auction blocked,

Paraded around, poked and prodded
Sold to whomever, where ever, **(screams)** MAMA!

Until massa rips that little girl from your arms.

(In the voice of African woman)

BUT I CAN STILL BRAID HAIR
BUT I CAN STILL BRAID HAIR
BUT I CAN STILL BRAID HAIR

At this very minute there is A Black woman braiding her daughter's hair
At this very minute there is a Black woman braiding some child's hair

And fingers hold memory.
And resistance is fashionable. **(Takes out hair accessories from pockets)**
And Rebellion be a unconscious singular silent act.
A cornrow.

Can you imagine?
Or DO You Not Have to?

Scene 2: Grandma

HOUSE LIGHTS UP FULL. He walks towards audience and sings

SONG

*A lang time gal me neva see you
Come let me 'old ya hand.
Lang time gal me neva see you
Come let 'old ya hand.
Peel-'ead John Crow
Sit down pon tree top
Pic off da blossoms
Let me 'old ya hand, gal
Let me 'old hand...*

*A lang time gal me neva see you
Come let me 'old ya hand.
Lang time gal me neva see you*

*Come let 'old ya hand.
Peel-'ead John Crow
Sit down pon tree top
Pic off da blossoms
Let me 'old ya hand, gal
Let me 'old hand...*

(To Audience Center stage)

My grandmother taught me this song.
I miss my grandma.

HOUSE LIGHTS UP FULL. He walks towards bed and begins to make it up

I am the first to be born here. The first from either side of my family. They got married, he came to America, she waited to be sent for. I am their firstborn child. I am their love child conceived after a year of separation. My name means Faith. I got a set of encyclopedias for my first birthday. I could read and write by the age of 4. I am the first to go to college. I am their American dream incarnate.

“Why ya do dat wit ya hair?”, my grandmother asked me
My dreadlocks are five years long and natty.
My grandmother was lucid, for the first time, in a long time, so they tell me.

She was in hospital, cracking jokes, talking at rapid speed about her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren, and the few great-greats.

“She’s a spunky one,” the nurses say to me.
They hold court around my grandmother’s bedside, the one she refuses to lie down in. She is upright and loving it.

“Dats mi granddawta,” she and points to me with pride. She tells the nurses stories about me as a baby. Stories I hadn’t heard before so I don’t know if they’re true or not.

My father would know.
But he’s off somewhere wrestling with doctors and relaying back news home to his sisters.

I am alone, for the first time in long time, with the woman who raised me.
Who walked me to and from kindergarten every day.
Who told me stories about Aunt Big Foot, Uncle Sonny Blue, and a place called
“Henry Lane.”

She, who would sit by the window and read from her Bible out loud.
She who would call home from her doctor appointments to find what had
happened on her soap operas that day.

My grandmother raised four boys and seven girls-alone.
Her husband died when my father was 10 years old.
My grandmother plowed fields, took in sewing, broke rock in quarries to feed her
family. **(He has made the bed. He surveys the bed from different angles. He
gets feedback from the audience. He then messes it up and remakes it. He
struggles with the sheets, the pillowcases until it clear to him and the
audience that there is something else behind this obsession with the bed
making. He stops, looks sheepishly towards the audience. Stops so close
he can touch them)**

My grandmother has been in and out of the hospital for several months, now.
And all of a sudden I realize she may not be with me for much longer.
(Stands there)

(Rushes back to the bed begins making it again)

Well we should talk!

Maybe she can impart some wisdom to me, give me some advice or something.
I should tell her about myself, who I am now. After all, she should have more to
tell these nurses besides stories about me as a baby.

(Moves back downstage)

There is always this awkwardness between people of different generations.
She was over 85. I was 26. We are worlds apart. What would we talk about? The
young feeling their lives are far too sophisticated for the old to understand. The
old feel that the young are too naïve to understand life in the first place.

As we drove to the hospital, my father said: “She’s old and in the hospital. Don’t
say anything that would upset your grandmother.”

So I listen. **(Walks back to bed. Pantomimes listening to grandmother)**

surrounded by the nurses)

(Aside to audience, then back to listening to grandmother)

She is going off about something.

I think is someone in our family.

I think it is someone of my generation.

Oh No; it's 8-year-old second cousin...

(Stands up over bed in Grandmother's accent and gestures)

"Who is too rank and facey for h'er age. She need to lisson and 'ear. I don't know what kind of tings they go on wit nowadays. But when you and yer sista were small, You two knew betta!"

The nurses smile at me.

I feel the halo encircle my head. At this moment I am a shining example of a good child; after all, I am here by my sick grandmother's bedside in the middle of a workday.

(As one of the nurses) "Well, Ms. Henry, you did a good job with this one,"

I think if my father was in the room, how his face would contort into his "disgusted look." **(Does look to full audience downstage)** That's when one side of his face is no longer symmetrical with the other side of his face. I know this look. I've seen it on many occasions. In fact, I think this "look" is permanently cemented to my father's face.

You see, for my father, who I am and how I was raised have absolutely nothing to do with each other.

I am Jamaican and raised in the church. **(Comes downstage to deliver sermon with accent)** And there is but one GOD and I can do all tings through Christ who strengthens me. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and whosoever believeth in me, shall not perish but have everlasting life! John: Tree:16.

(Comes downstage left /Has different gesture for each family member)

My father sits on the all male-only board of elders that governs their church. He is the superintendent of the Sunday school.

My mother is a Sunday school teacher, church van driver, Christmas and Easter program director and leads the women's ministry.

My sister is also a Sunday school teacher, has a master's in secondary Christian education and is gainfully employed by a Christian school.

My brother is a freshman at a Christian college, preaches monthly, and plays the drums every Sunday for the Praise and Worship Team.

(Runs back to the bed)

The outgoing message on my family's answering machine is as follows:

"Hello. You have reached the Henry residence. No one come to the phone right now because we are busy, out doing God's work...Please leave a message"

(Aside to Audience)

...I am an atheist.

(With father's accent)

"She's old and in the hospital. Don't say anything that would upset your grandmother. Don't say anything that will kill my mother."

I am alone with my Grammy who only has stories about me when I was 3. And I am not supposed to tell her anything about my life?

What does he think I going to say?

"What's that, Grandma? **(Does a over the top soft show routines and locates Hand-held mic and speaks like a game show host)**

What am I doing with my life?

What do I do?

Well, for starters, I am a writer.

I don't have a regular job that makes real money. I know that's important to our family, but I'm selfish and ungrateful and doing what I want to do, no matter who it hurts.

I write short stories and poems, but you can't read any of them, Grammy.
Because they may kill you.

And I am also an actor.
Remember when I used to put on those plays in the living room?
Well, I went to school to become an actor.

(Over emotes)

Oh, no, Grandma!
I can't invite you to any of my plays.
That would be out of the question.

(To downstage to audience)

In fact, my mother and father refuse to come see me perform because they say
it corrupts their minds.

(Back to bed)

When I not writing or acting, **(Superhero mode)**
I am an activist!
What is an activist?
I fight against injustice
That's right! I fight against everything my good Christian parents believe in.

That doesn't pay any money either, Grandma.

But sometimes I do have a paying job, and it's political, too.
That's right! I work with people with AIDS.

(Frankenstein mode)

Yes, the wrath and scourge of God sent down upon the wicked of the earth.

Yes, the disease that killed Auntie. **(Downstage Center)**

She was 42 and a nurse before universal precautions.
And she got very sick.
And she lost lots of weight.
And her whole immune system collapse.
And she was on AZT.
But NO!... She did not have AIDS.

Because only gay people get AIDS and Auntie was not gay.

(Tiptoes back to bed)

But, guess what Grandma?

I'm gay.

(Cheerleader mode)

G. A. Y. GAY!

I'm a manroyal

Mi a sodomite

I'm a battybwoy

Mi gwan wit dat fool fool bizness.

And, no one approves of my lifestyle and I am going straight to hell.

I know I'm not the only gay person in the family. **(Kneels down)**

But I'll wait to tell you that story once you get out of surgery.

(Stands up)

And I know right now that I may be your GRANDDAWTA ...But not for much longer.

Remember when I said

(Child accent)

I'm gonna to be a man when I grow up!

Well, Grandma, **(runs stage right then stage left to audience)**

I'm going to have chest surgery. And I'm gonna take male hormones

(Filled with Holy Ghost accent)

And soon, Yes! Lawd! Jesus Christ!

Tank Q Fada!

(Announces) I will be your grandson!

(Remembers audience and transitions awkwardly back into "real time", goes back to making bed, then slips into to grandmother's voice)

(Back to bedside)

"Why ya do dat wit yer hair? "Ya turn Rasta?"

"No, Grammy,"

“Well, I guess it is de style.”

And she was off to the next topic.

My grandmother died March of 1997. I wore a white shirt, black pants no tie-to her funeral. My lover high-heeled, lipstick, and a scarf around her neck. I was the only “woman” in pants. My father did not speak to me the whole day.

(Unmakes bed slowly, and sings)

*Long time gal me neva see you
Come let me ‘old ya hand*

LIGHT CUE – SLOW FADE OUT

*Long time gal me neva see you
Come let me ‘old ya hand
Peel head John Crow
Sit pon tree top*

(Walks away with bedding up stairs stage right)

*Let me ‘old ya hand, gal
Let me ‘old hand...*

Scene 3: Chickkeebodoe

This text is written entirely in Jamaican Patois (Patwa) and the writer’s interpretation of what it may of sounded like from an 18th century African.

Translation of some words appears in italics. There is also a historical reference to Nanny, who led the Maroons at the beginning of the 18th century. She is one of Jamaica’s national heroes.

(A soft chant to a roar, “Chickkeebodoe” is heard off stage. “Cuffy,” a Jamaican Maroon warrior, enters stage right with a staff in his hand, Chanting louder and louder, He looks out into the audience as if stalking prey. He runs and dips down each side of the stage, and then he runs menacing towards audience, stops halfway then speaks)

(Low deep voice, slowly spoken)

When deh COME fo you.
Deh COME quik ,
Deh mek no sound.

You lay in bed, asleep,
You and you oman, (**Woman**)
A sleep, still

(YELLED) And den deh Come fo you. In one motion!

(He paces and stalks and swings his staff as he talks)

When mi (*I*) was a bwoy (**boy**) a little pickney, (**child**)
mi mummah and pupah (**mama & papa**)
dem wake mi
eena de middle hov di KnighT (**in the middle of the night**)
mi an mi baby sista
And we ahl rUN way apon de MOUNTIside. (**And we all run away upon the mountainside**)

We stay deh up walkIN a Long Long Time.
And Den we find dem (**And then we find them**)
All adem a live together. Dem hunt and fish and plant tings together, like one big natural family.
Honly Black man and Black woman and Black pickney and no one Master.

Dem deh times, was da fuss time (**it was the first time**)
mi NUFFraid fe close mi eyes at night an sleep
KUZE no one COME fe beat mi mommah
No one come fe whip or pupah, mi baby sista or mi.

When mi get Bigga, I go wid de men dem down de MOUNTINside. Go back to where the BUCKrah dem live. (**Buckra disparaging term among US blacks for “white person,” especially a poor one, 1790, apparently from an African language; cf. mbakara “master” in Efik, a language of the Ibibio people of southern Nigeria**)

And we would Take dem Back.
Take Dem back from dem MasTerS

KUZE No man should own ANADA man.
NO man should beat and kill ANADA man.

Mi stan up deh wid mi machete

Mi stan UP ovah dem bed.

And mi feel Trong.

Trong like when Obeah mek mi trong.

(Obeah refers to African diasporic folk religions)

And mi stand deh ... And I...

(Goes into the spirit, then has a change of thought)

Deers iz a oman. *(There is a woman)*

Nanny.

She de leada ovah alla wi. *(She is the leader over all of "we")*

Nanny sah, "Cuffy!, Wi Can't Stop fight til Wi Win."

Dat what Nanny seh. What Nanny she, ATRU.

(Cuffy chants Chickeeboodoe until there is a transition to "Imani" character)

Imani (center stage)

The say it's not bravery if you're not scared.

But what choice takes more courage to stand up all alone for something you believe, when no one else around thinks your right.

Or stand together in unity with a group decision even if you all don't agree?

You ever think about it?

Have you ever had to make a life or death decision? No mean really... like what ever I do in the next minute will determine whether I live or die.

Do think got they voted or got consensus? Was there caucusing among nations and translation provided when they came back together from the small group discussions.

Did they decide who would go first? Who would create a distraction?

Wait for the moment, race to edge, dive head first, plunge foot long, knowing there was no turning back.

When they hit the water did they feel terror or relief?

Some would say it was like a planned prison escape
they were economic saboteurs
Martyrs...
16th century suicide bombers.

Some would say they were cowards, weak-minded, taking the easy way out.

(The voice of dissent)

“We watched elder after elder and child after child. We lost half our village so those us left behind refused to give up, refused to give in. No matter what we had to survive. We never gave up hope.”

It took between 5-12 weeks
60 million people and only 1/3 survived.

What choice would you have made?

I call ever Black man and women I encounter sister and brother because they could be.

I sometimes I wonder who from my family are at the bottom of the sea.

MUSIC & VIDEO GO

(Imani Dances in downstage center while video montage plays in the background)

Music by The Haitian band Boukman Eksperyans sung in Haitian Creole depicting the “The Goddess of Ocean” denouncing US for crimes against humanity and the environment. Video montage of images of indigenous cultures and peoples around the world, then images of resistance movement, particularly of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa – when thousands Toyi-toyi (march) in the streets, then to 2004 images of in Brooklyn demonstrations demanding the return of President Aristide to Haiti.

“George Bush ! Liar!”

“George Bush ! Liar!”

“George Bush ! Liar!”

The end?