

Where the Mountain Meets the Sea

Written by Jeff Augustin

Music by The Bengsons

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Commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville

Characters

Jean – Mid 60s Haitian Man

Jonah – Early 30s Haitian American Man

The Band – An ensemble who aide in language, dance & music.

Setting

A space of possibility. It is then, and now, and years in the unknown future. Light and dark form the boundaries and memory is as real as the concrete walls of the theatre.

Notes

The Band can range in size, gender, age, sexuality and race. Their lines can be said by one, a few or all. Jean and Jonah should be considered part of the band.

(A tight spot reveals JEAN. He stands upright, professional. He seems younger, yet the same age.)

JEAN

Je Parle.

Tu parles.

On Parle

Nous Parlons

Vous Parlez

French Conjugation. Light. Sound of my students' necks cracking as they turn their heavy heads. My friend, *Emil*. In the doorway. Her face. Mix of joy and sorrow. Of envy and pity. The first of my last memories of my country. Memories I force myself to make. Like a bride and groom on their wedding day, I knew it would be too fast. A blur. Every step, every word I try to remember.

But memory. Fades. Becomes fragmented truth. But I try to remember every day. I try.

4th Grade. What America calls 4th Grade. Teaching. My Students. My life. I taught General Education. It was French Hour. My favorite Hour. My students not so much. Well there was one who liked it.

Angie

Or

Ansel

Or

Anne

Let's say Anne. It was a normal day. Not bad, not good. Just normal. *Emil* pulled me outside. I tasked my students to practice their conjugations, but they knew, they knew what was happening so they muttered and cried. *Emil's* words, I've lost with Age with Time. Her red lips. The black eyeliner that lined them. The mole she made on her right.

(Correcting himself...)

Left side.

That slight gap in her front top two teeth she would hide when she laughed. That I've held on to. If we weren't there. If my students weren't peering through the windows. I would have kissed her.

Emil told me my vessel was leaving that night for America. I knew it would happen that week. Just not when. You see I was legal. Got a visa. A crew worker visa. The way these ships worked, it was legal on top, two in a cabin. Illegals smuggled down in the bottom. Six. Seven. In a cabin. That's why the ship leaves without a date or time. Easier to smuggle people.

Emil and I walked down to the front gate, down the dusty path I took every morning. Alone. Every evening. Alone. Silent. We were always silent. That's what we enjoyed most about each

other. Though on that day I wish she spoke. Her voice. Has faded. When we got to the gate.

We stood. Silently. More silently than we walked. We did something we never did before. We held each other. She smelled better than she did in my dreams. The dreams I had of us in America. Together. Of us running a school together. Building a home. Raising a child. A son. In my dreams, always a son. One with her humor and intelligence. My pragmatism and strength. She smelled better than my dreams of us all together. She smelled of

(Mother/Memory instrumental begins, underscores the following)

Rose water
Cocoa butter
Baby powder

Years later, it's a scent I will occasionally get at the airport. When I pick up a bag. A piece of luggage. I will wonder if it's hers. What happened to her. What we said when we held each other.

If I told her I loved her.

Or

If she told me, she loved me

Or

If we just left, walked silently.

There are memories that happened and memories I wish happened. I never know which are better or which to let go.

I rushed to my mom's house, where my bags were packed. My mom made me one last meal – Griot. Bannann. Fried Pork, fried Plantain. Instead of speaking. Of saying all the things we felt in our hearts. We said nothing. As we ate my mom filled the silence between us, by humming to a song on the radio. A moun mon song.

*(JEAN sings a fragment of what we will come to know as SONJÉ
M/REMEMBER ME)*

*Sonjé m (Remember me)
Lè mwen té volé (When I have flown)*

*la vi sa déyò (Out of this life)
Andan o (Into oh)*

A mountain people song. About a voyage. I wish we had spoken the words in our heart. But neither of us knew she. My Mother. Would die. and I'd never see her again.

I got in a car. alone. I got on a boat. Alone.

(A sound of a cargo ship, a new piece of music.)

(Ocean Theme Instrumental underscoring the following)

I could not keep anything down. All the food I was given, all the water, came right back up. I lost a lot of weight. It was good. I was heavy then. Though everyone is heavy in America. Which I didn't expect because of the movies. But I like it. People are meant to look alive. Skinny people look too much like death. I gave the food I couldn't eat to a little girl downstairs. An illegal who snuck up once. She looked like

Anne.

Angie.

Ansel.

All three.

I left in 1978, a few days before Christmas. Arrived in 1979, a few days after New Years. I knew when the water, the Haiti Blue Ocean turned to Miami Green. I knew, Haiti was no longer

HOME.

SONJÉ M (REMEMBER ME)

MOTHER'S RECORDED VOICE

Sonjé m (Remember me)
Lè mwen té volé (When I have flown)

JEAN

Sonjé m (Remember me)
Lè mwen té volé (When I have flown)

la vi sa déyò (Out of this life)
Andan o (Into oh)

JEAN/BAND 1

Sonjé m (Remember me)
Lè mwen té alé (When I am gone)
Mwen té vwayajé o manman (I'm travelling oh mama)

JEAN/JONAH/BAND 1

Mwen té vwayajé o gason (I'm travelling oh son)

JEAN/JONAH/FULL BAND

Gro dlo yo té rélé m lakay (The ocean is calling me home)

Lwen lwen lwen (Away away away)
Dé lakaY (From home)
Lwen lwen lwen (Away away away)
Dé lakaY (From home)
Gro dlo té rélé (The ocean is calling)
Té di o (Saying oh)

JEAN

Gro dlo té rélé (The ocean is calling)

Té di o (Saying oh)

JONAH

My father died in Miami while I was falling in love with a married man in LA. He was a homosexual, so it was okay. Not okay, but you know what I mean.

We met in some rich woman's backyard – she was a humanitarian I was told. One of those active – lick envelopes, go organize, philanthropic humanitarians. It was her birthday and I was a guest. Well, the guest of my friend. A guest in her beautiful, multi-million-dollar home, where surprisingly there were many people of color. And we were all in her backyard, fire roaring, Christmas lights strung, listening to this band. Folk band play. A husband and wife duo. I never liked folk music. I associate it with grief. My dad would play folk every year on the anniversary of my mom's death. He would lock himself in his bedroom after drinking half a bottle of Haitian rum. He didn't think I could hear him crying.

But there I was, listening to folk drinking shitty local whiskey. When he – the married man – sat next to my friend.

(Band plays an old timey instrumental on the guitar, underscoring the following)

He didn't strike me at first. Truthfully I thought he was straight. But then he whispered something in my ear – “you're dripping” – there was a crack in my glass. And I looked him in his eyes to say thank you. And they were blue. A kind of blue I've only seen once in my life. In Haiti. The ocean. With my dad.

This married man was older. 20 years older. And he was a ginger. I had a thing for gingers and daddies. We started talking and I learned that he was a writer. A novelist. Fiction. Queer. With a handlebar mustache. And the text print on his phone was so large he could only read one at a time, two if they were short. And he couldn't find his reading glasses. And he was beautiful. Smart, dreamy. Fit. Looking at me. Touching my shoulder – politely. Gave me a ride home, before rushing to his husband's drag show. A show where he played all of the village men, stripping down as he went along. I wish I could've seen it.

I was seeing someone I should add and we were open. Open to sex, but not to falling in love. But I fell in love with him this married man Karl, and we loved for many weeks in LA. A ginger. Haiti Ocean eyes. Queer. Novelist. Daddy. We fell in love drinking shitty whiskey, listening to Folk music. Under the LA liberal American stars.

(Instrumental intro to EVERYTHING TO ME begins)

Then my daddy died. My actual daddy. My Haitian dad. And I was sad. Cause I had to leave Karl. And my dad will never know Karl. Will never know the man I had an open relationship with. Know what an open relationship is. Know That I'm gay. Know Me.

EVERYTHING TO ME

*Yeah, you didn't take my hand
I thought you might wanna walk over this land
With me, I was open to you
You didn't like what you saw or you never knew*

*The space that you occupied
Within my heart didn't go away when you died
My heart didn't die with you
Although I felt like I wanted
O wanted it to*

*You were
Everything
To me*

*8 years old and I already saw
I wasn't the kind of boy you wanted at all
I was soft where I should of been hard
What should have been clean was already scarred*

*The palm shed its leaves in the yard
The paint off of the stucco and your old beat up car
Cigarette in your sleeping hand
I still expect to see you wherever I land*

*You were
Everything
To Me*

*You were
Everything
To Me*