

**THE NIGHT SKY**

A play by Lisa D'Amour

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**TIME**

Present

**PLACE**

New York City

**CHARACTERS**

Marcel – Mid 30's white man.

Jen – Early 30's white woman. Marcel's wife.

Morgan – Early 40's white man. Marcel's brother.

Amy – Early 30's white woman.

Julien – 23 year old African American man.

Anuk – 57 year old African American woman. Julien's mother.

The Apparition / Will / Sign Man – Mid 30's white man.

Gallery Owner/Man With Birdhouse Suitcase/Old Man/Man With I Pod/Voice of Interviewer – Mid 30's African American Man,

**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

While this play is set in the heart of New York city, the “base” set should be a series of tall, thick trees, such as one might find in Central Park. Other locations in the play should somehow emerge from this “forest”. Apartments are nestled in tree branches, an office connects to an outdoor café via a rope bridge hanging between trees, etcetera.

The visual art referenced in this play is inspired by the work of Vija Celmins, a contemporary painter and sculptor known for, among other things, finely detailed paintings and drawings of spider webs, oceans and the night sky.

This play was originally commissioned by Playwrights' Horizons, and has had readings Playwrights' Horizons, New Dramatists, The Playwrights Center and The Lark.

For Najeeulah Madyun and Larry Sarrat.

*Before the audience lights dim:*

*Five or Six thick, tall trees. They should look ultra-real.*

*The sound of crickets, constant, perhaps a few bull frogs.*

*Perhaps the rustle of small animals running through the leaves.*

*The sound of a cab driving by.*

*The sound of several cabs driving by.*

*The sounds of the nighttime forest mix and morph with the sounds of the city.*

*As the audience lights dim:*

*Amy, appears in a long, flowing white nightgown She is feeling the texture of the trees.*

*Will leans against a tree, watching, from the shadows. We don't really see him.*

*Amy moves in and out of the trees, sometimes visible, sometimes not.*

*Marcel enters. He wears a nice business suit. He is barefoot, and sleepwalking. He moves his hands as though he is giving a speech, as though he is giving a speech to the trees.*

*He turns around: there is a long gray tail coming through a slit in the back of his pants, reaching down to the floor.*

*When we see Amy again, she wears deer antlers. She walks among the trees.*

*Anuk crosses the stage, in slippers, a T shirt, sweatpants and an open bathrobe. She has a crow's beak, a breast plate of black feathers. She scratches her feathers. And moves among the trees, perhaps searching for bugs with her beak.*

*Amy is gone from the stage.*

*We hear Morgan's cries from offstage "Julien! Julien!"*

*Marcel and Anuk are still on stage when Morgan enters. His clothes are disheveled. He's dirty, drunk and frisky. He's yelling "Come on, Motherfucker! Come on you homo!" He stumbles around the space.*

*We hear Amy's cries from off stage: "Will! Will I lost you!"*

*Jen enters, in nightgown, barefoot. Two long, graceful rabbit ears stretch back from her real ears. She is gathering nuts, which she piles in a pouch she has created in her skirt.*

*Will still leans against the tree. Morgan stumbles toward him, stopping maybe 5 feet away. Morgan sways and stares.*

*Will growls at him, kind of playfully, swiping at Morgan with imaginary claws. Will turns in a circle and disappears into a hole in the ground, feet first.*

*Morgan says: Woah.*

*Amy enters, now in party clothes, maybe a floor length dress and high boots.*

*Amy calls "Will?"*

*Morgan calls "Julien?"*

*Amy calls: "Will, no fair! Where are you!"*

*Morgan calls "Julien please, I'm a mess! Come here you big homo! Julien please!"*

*Julien appears. He is dressed simply and neatly, but his clothes are cheap. He watches Morgan for a moment.*

*A baby starts crying. Jen drops the nuts, they scatter on the floor. She walks in the direction of the baby crying, and exits the stage.*

*Anuk makes her way off stage.*

*A cell phone rings, and Marcel leaves the stage in the direction of the ring.*

JULIEN  
(To Morgan.)  
Hey.

MORGAN  
Oh my god.

The lights shift to suggest a "real" forest. The city sounds an ever present din, mixing with sounds of the night. Central Park, 2AM. We notice the remains of a picnic: a blanket, a half empty wine bottle, food.

Julien walks towards Morgan, slow and deliberate.

Morgan unbuckles his pants, helplessly turned on. In the shadows, Julien kneels in front of Morgan.

MORGAN

Oh my OK it's a nice night out.

Slower.

My head is full of cheese.

In line for pancakes, I couldn't remember if it was breakfast or dinner.

I asked for a pork chop and the volunteer just shook his head.

Fuck that volunteer.

A little faster please. Not that fast. There.

He sniffs.

I have a cold. Stop.

Julien stops. Morgan breathes in two deep breaths. Ah. Ah. Choo! He sneezes. Wipes his nose with the back of his hand.

OK.

Julien continues.

Uh the kitten I had when I was little

Had only three paws

Whatever happened to that kitty

Little kitty.

In the distance: a wolf howl. Huh?

Woah.

His attention is back on Julien.

I had a brother who had all the answers.

He would flap his arms like a bird to get the teachers attention

One time they tied him to his chair.

"Help your brother." They would say.

"He needs your help."

OK.

OK.

Amy enters, still drunk, trying to find Will.

AMY

Will is that -

MORGAN  
Shit.

AMY  
Oh.

Amy is paralyzed by the moment.

MORGAN  
Shit shit shit.

Julien disengages. Morgan covers himself.

JULIEN  
What the –

Julien turns around, sees Amy.

AMY  
Oh my god.

Amy runs off. Julien turns in circles, as though looking for his keys.

JULIEN  
Um...um...um....

MORGAN  
Um...

JULIEN  
Shit –

MORGAN  
She she was drunk, She...she's gone.

Morgan and Julien share a moment of embarrassment.

JULIEN  
I got walked in on once in high school. I got walked in on in -- get this --  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor boys bathroom. In Bed Stuy. We was supposed to be at basketball practice,  
and we got, well, huh, DISTRACTED. Me and the captain of the basketball team. I was  
all like shakey but he was like: relax. I am the captain of the basketball team.

He touched my cheek and I thought:

The world is good.  
I'm gonna do great things with my life.

Why people gotta flip out? Why can't people walk in on something like that and be like - Huh. Looka that. I've never seen that before, Let's all go out for a slice of pie. If Mr. Sylvester Williams, 9<sup>rd</sup> grade Social Studies teacher was more like that, I'd prob'ly be working in a high rise office building today. Making phone calls and drinking coffee out of a mug.

MORGAN  
No, actually you wouldn't.

Julien is perturbed: he was trying to make Morgan feel better.

Marcel appears, in his office on the 34<sup>th</sup> floor of a Manhattan office building.

Well, you wouldn't.

Morgan finds a half empty bottle of wine.

Somebody left some wine.

He takes a swig.

You want some?

Julien's gotta go.

JULIEN  
Thanks for my tour of the big white city.

MORGAN  
Hey, hey.

Morgan takes his hand, tries to keep him from leaving.

You are something.

JULIEN  
Meet me on the corner of Nostrand and Fulton. Tomorrow at five.

MORGAN  
Nostrand?

JULIEN

Nostrand Avenue. In Brooklyn, homo. It's across the river. You can't see it from here.

MARCEL

Morgan you have 5 minutes.

MORGAN

Tomorrow at five.

JULIEN

Tomorrow at five.

Julien takes Morgan's hand, leans down as though he is going to kiss it. Morgan swoops down and kisses Julien on the mouth instead. Julien runs off.

Morgan turns towards the area where Marcel sits.

MARCEL

Morgan you have 4 minutes.

Morgan grabs a well-worn sports coat, picks up a tattered briefcase, and walks into Marcel's office, putting on the coat.

MORGAN

Little brother. Seems like yesterday, right? In our little bunk beds till we were way too big for bunk beds. Who got the best grades? Even though I didn't even try? Who got the best grades?

He looks out the window of Marcel's office.

Nice view.

Remember the time I made you cry in front of Betsy Harshbarger? Or when I made you shoplift gobstopper gumballs for my friends? These are the kind of events that sting while they are happening but later you realize that they bond you to a person. Pain binds people together. Also humiliation.

I am your brother.

I'm homeless.

I'm an addict.

I'm gay.

Marcel cringes just the slightest bit.

I'm irritable.

I'm outspoken.

Remember the time I made you hand wash my underwear so mom wouldn't know I had an accident? Ha ha. Now that's bonding

A pause during which Marcel shifts his weight.

Do you want me to get down on my knees?

I live in the park. I may be the only homeless left in the park. I refuse to be carted out to the Bronx. I'm not THAT homeless. I could stay with Stephen Duffy in his loft but who the fuck can stand Stephen Duffy and his plasto-styrene lumps of "art"?

Do you want me to get down on my knees?

A moment, then Morgan slides out his chair and gets down on his knees.

The copy room. It's all I ask for. The copy room. Or maybe the mail room.

He's pushing it.

The copy room. I won't let you down..

Jen appears in another space. She is holding the baby.

MARCEL

You can't live with us. We've got a brand new baby. You can't live with us.

MORGAN

I'll live in the park, then I'll find my own place.

MARCEL

In Manhattan?

MORGAN

Of course in Manhattan.

The brothers consider each other for a moment. Jen begins to sing softly to the baby. We hear a few lines, and the rest overlaps with Marcel's next speech.

JEN

The sun is in the sky  
And the wolf is in the tree.  
Looking down at baby  
Shhhhhh now sleep.

The moon is in the water  
And the tiger in the bush.  
Gazing at the baby  
Shhhhh now sleep.

We go underneath the quiet  
Underneath the quiet  
Underneath the quiet  
Down we go down  
Go Underneath the quiet  
Underneath the quiet  
Underneath the quiet  
Shhhhh now sleep.

MORGAN  
The copy room.  
I'm saving your  
paychecks.  
I give you \$50, twice  
A week, the rest you  
save. You're going  
to have savings,  
Morgan, in the bank.  
I want you cleaned up  
and back here today.  
this afternoon, 3pm  
sharp got it?  
I'm not fooling around.

Marcel's phone has been ringing. He picks it up as he gathers papers into a briefcase.

MORGAN  
Little brother. Makin' it big.

JEN  
(Hushed voice.)  
Marcel is that you?

Somehow Marcel races from his office-in-the-trees to his apartment-in-the-trees.

MARCEL  
I'm here, sorry I'm here -

JEN  
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

MARCEL  
(Taking off his tie.)  
OK, so big news!  
They're actually talking to each other.  
It's really happening.  
It's real.

JEN  
(Under her breath.)  
Marcel.

JEN

Look. Just look. She's real.

Jen and Marcel look at their baby for a few seconds.

MARCEL

Are you sure?

To the baby.

Are you real?

JEN

Shhhhhh.

Jen leaves to put the baby to sleep. Marcel stretches, and does a few boxing moves.

MARCEL

Dialogue can happen. Consensus can happen. Compromise is necessary, but consensus is real.

Jen comes out of the baby's room. She's on task, looking for something.

JEN

It's awesome, puppyface but where's my bra. Not the nursing bra. I want my good old fashioned push-up-your-tits bra.

MARCEL

It's going to be amazing.

Marcel grabs Jen and picks her up off the floor, so they are face to face.

MARCEL

You. Are amazing.

A quick kiss.

JEN

Puppy I'm gonna be late.

MARCEL

Where are you going?

Jen rolls her eyes: she's told him a million times. She speaks as she walks into the bedroom.

JEN

She'll be hungry when she wakes up but I pumped and it's in the fridge. She's done some pretty cute things today! But she needs some Daddy time.

MARCEL

Did you get my shirts? I wore this one two days in a row and I felt like one of your clients.

Jen comes back out with her shirt off and her nursing bra on. She is still looking for her other bra.

JEN

Yes but barely because there's that wolf -

MARCEL

What?

Jen finds her bra in the couch or something during this speech.

JEN

You know that wolf and there were blockades and even the National Guard and for some reason people used it as an excuse to leave work EARLY – how is this here -- so the line for the drycleaner was around the block and Lucy is in the papoose SCREAMING and the old man in front of me turns and says “Little giiiiirl shhhhhh or ze WOLF iz going to EAT you.”

MARCEL

A wolf?

JEN

They showed it on the news like five times today.  
Wandering up and down the West Side highway.  
From some weird circussy thing that's here from maybe Serbia?  
There was a glitch. A faulty latch.

MARCEL

And it's out there?

JEN

They stunned it on Canal Street with a you know stun gun.

Jen exits to their bedroom. She speaks from off stage.

MARCEL

Oh.

JEN

So your shirts are in the closet and the baby is fine. Uneaten. Oh in addition to your shirts look at this!

She comes out of the bedroom carrying a large-sized woven basket, close to three feet tall, with a woven, detachable lid.

Found it on the street. I'm going to clean it up and use it for dried flowers or maybe umbrellas.

MARCEL

Wow.

JEN

On the street!

She leaves it there and goes back into her room. Marcel is standing next to it, a little befuddled. He lifts up the lid, looks inside, puts the lid back on. He brushes his hands off on his pants: it was dusty and a little gross.

JEN

So you're good?

MARCEL

I'm good.

JEN

You boxed?

Marcel practices a few boxing moves.

MARCEL

At lunch.

JEN

Do you like the basket?

Marcel continues to box.

MARCEL

I think you should come tomorrow, Jen. After so much back and forth! I feel like a translator. But I feel good. I can go out there tomorrow and speak sincerely. I'm sincere, right? I mean what I say. I am saying this and I am meaning this. When I am saying these words, when I am speaking these words to you, I am sincere. I am. I am.

From offstage.

JEN

Yes but do you like the basket?

MARCEL

The what?

JEN

The basket I found on the street.

Marcel touches the basket. It's dusty.

MARCEL

Oh, yeah, it's a nice one but maybe a little gross.

JEN

I had to tug it to pry it loose.

MARCEL

What?

Maybe Jen stands in the door, mid-hair fixing. Or pokes her head out?

JEN

Someone left it in this little park over by the river. Sandwiched between two high rises. The whole thing is designed I think around these three old trees, I think they had to, the park people, I think the trees are historic. It was nestled way in the back, I had to kind of dig it out.

MARCEL

Jen!

JEN

What?

MARCEL

It was probably part of the park.

JEN

Marcel it's a basket.

MARCEL

And anyway you should be careful. People live in those parks. Weird people. Unstable people.

JEN

Yes but its such a nice basket.

Jen goes back into the room. Marcel lifts the lid, looks in the basket, puts the lid back on, brushes his hands on his pants.

MARCEL

Morgan came in to my office today.

JEN

(From off stage)

WHAT!

MARCEL

Morgan came into the –

Jen storms on stage, now in her pants but topless, holding the push up bra.

JEN

WE ARE NOT INTERACTING WITH MORGAN!

MARCEL

Honey, hold –

JEN

WE ARE NOT INTERACTING WITH MORGAN. Your brother is a fucking CRACK ADDICT. Yes? A CRACK ADDICT who fucked himself over and lost the job of a fucking lifetime because he would RATHER CRAWL UNDER A CAR WITH STRANGERS TO SMOKE CRACK than make half a million dollars at J.P. Morgan. He'd rather run up his credit cards AND OUR CREDIT CARDS for 25 fucking grand -

MARCEL

He's sick –

JEN

YES HE IS SICK! He is sick and he is an asshole and we HATE him -

MARCEL

I don't –

JEN

WE HATE HIM AND WE WILL NOT ASSOCIATE WITH HIM. MARCEL, THE LAST TIME WE SAW HIM, HE CALLED ME A CUNT-FACED KYKE.

The baby starts to cry.

JEN  
Shit.

MARCEL  
Here, let me.

JEN  
Shit.

MARCEL  
Let me just, can I please just –

Marcel moves behind Jen and reaches around and cradles her breasts in his hands.

JEN  
(Meaning to protest, but losing the impulse as she says his name.)  
Marcel –

The baby cries.

Your hands are cold..

MARCEL  
Shhh.

Imitating something Marcel said in what now seems like a prior life.

JEN  
“Breast feeding is sexy.”

Marcel cradles her breasts for a moment.

JEN  
I’m going to be late.

She moves away from Marcel and holds up the push up bra, looking at it as though it were a relic from another planet.

MARCEL  
Where are you going?

Jen exits the room. Marcel looks at the basket. The baby cries.

Amy is sitting at the sidewalk tables at a café in the East Village. She is maybe texting.

We see Jen dressing quickly and rushing out the house with bags.

Marcel exits to the baby's room.

Anuk sits in a chair in her apartment in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The TV is on but she is asleep.

Julien walks up to her door, taking out his keys, quietly turning the lock and opening it.

He enters the apartment and closes the door quietly, and stands looking at Anuk.

The baby stops crying.

Jen runs up to the table where Amy sits. She carries several large shopping bags.

JEN

I'm so so so so -

AMY

No it's OK -

JEN

Really, it's just, I'm in like multitask hell -

AMY

You're fine, it's fine, you're here.

JEN

I'm here, yes -

AMY

You're here.

Beat.

Jenny Jen!

JEN

Amy-aims-to-please.

AMY  
Oh god!

JEN  
I know!

AMY  
It's been too long, we're such dorks -

Marcel comes out with the baby, sits on the couch near the basket.  
"Shushes" the baby. Amy points to two egg creams on the table.

I ordered us egg creams, we're having egg creams.

JEN  
Oh my god yes!

AMY  
Jen, you look so great!

JEN  
Look at me I'm a walrus, I'm like a really really jiggly walrus.

AMY  
No, no, no you've gotten sexier.

JEN  
Really?

AMY  
Oh my god yes! You wore all those turtlenecks --

JEN  
I did? Maybe they were in style...

AMY  
You are totally hot now.

JEN  
Really?

AMY  
So what's it like? Sit down! Do you love it? Do you feel good?

JEN  
Yes! I'm tired! It's crazy!

AMY

It's like you have this thing, this creature, that suddenly needs you more than anybody else -

JEN

Yes!

AMY

And all those things you used to obsess about....your career, money -

JEN

God, yes -

AMY

Your 5 year plan it's like, poof, they're gone, because the world has suddenly focused in on this tiny, little helpless thing, wriggling in your hands.

JEN

Yes. Kind of. Yes. That's it.

AMY

That's what all my friends with babies say. Amazing. Astounding. And Martin, Martin's good with it?

Marcel pushes the basket a little bit away from him with his foot.

JEN

Um -

AMY

I want to see it! It must be what like 3 -

JEN

Almost 4 months. Crazy, right? It's insane. You'll see her. And yes Marcel is very good with her.

AMY

Ah! Marcel right Marcel. Marcel Marcel Marcel.

JEN

With Lucille. Lucy, for short.

AMY

After your grandmother!

JEN  
Yeah.

In Anuk's space, Julien creeps across the room and exits into another room so we can't see him.

Marcel pushes the basket a little farther away with his foot.

JEN  
So what's going on? You said you're working at that Gallery –

AMY  
Yeah, whatever, yeah -

JEN  
And you had that show in Bushwick....I think I got an email about it....

AMY  
Yeah, but that was nothing. OH GOD it was nothing...I thought it was going to be something but it was really nothing so forget it. It's stupid.

JEN  
It's totally incredible -

AMY  
You think?

JEN  
What you are doing -

AMY  
I don't know –

JEN  
No I mean really in college you said "I am becoming an artist" and you became an artist.