

A Case for Black Girls Setting Central Park on Fire
By Kori Alston

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this play is for my sisters

CHARACTERS:

12-Year-Old Black Girl

Nat Turner

Rottweiler

Alley Fire Woman

SETTING:

Part 1 Brownsville, Brooklyn

Part 2 Brooklyn, moving East

Part 3 Alley, Lower East Side

Part 4 Central Park, moving North

YEAR:

Now

TIME:

Late Morning

Sundown

Midnight

Daybreak

NOTE:

Rottweiler is a life-sized puppet that should be controlled by a Black femme.

In Parts 2 and 4, the characters are running in place

(this should not be mimed, some portion of the stage should function as a treadmill)

Before the action of the play begins, a short paragraph about Nat Turner should be protected on stage.

The fire is a real fire.

PART 1

Sunday, late morning. 12-Year-Old Black Girl is in a church. The choir is singing "I Got Out" (think Indiana Bible College Choir). The choir and two soloists are only seen in silhouette upstage. 12-Year-Old Black Girl's back is facing the audience. She is sitting in a pew all alone. She is witnessing the celebration but not taking part in it. Nat and Woman should improvise vocally on top of the choir, alternating.

*I've been through the fire but I got out
Said I've been through the fire but I got out
No matter what you're going through
He's gonna make a way for you
Soon you're gonna say "I got out"*

NAT

Say it again

*I've been through the fire but I got out
Said I've been through the fire but I got out
No matter what you're going through
He's gonna make a way for you
Soon you're gonna say "I got out"*

WOMAN

Hey! That's it!

Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Haha!

If you've gotten out of a mess

A struggle, a situation

Then I know you'll know how to praise Him on this one right here

C'mon!

*I've been through the fire but I got out
Said I've been through the fire but I got out
No matter what you're going through
He's gonna make a way for you
Soon you're gonna say "I got out"*

NAT

Anybody got a testimony tonight?

Of your struggle, of your affliction, of your addiction

Has he gotten you out?

NAT

Let me hear you
Has he gotten you out?
Hey! Okay Now!

He brought me out (I got out)
Said he brought me out (I got out)
Oh yes lord (I got out)
Said he brought me out (I got out)

He brought me out (I got out)
Said he brought me out (I got out)
Yes he brought me out (I got out)
Said he'll bring you out, yes he will

I've got no more chains (I got out)
No more chains (I got out)
I've got no more chains (I got out)
Yes he'll bring you out, yes he will

WOMAN

I want everybody in this church to put their hands together if he's brought you out

I said God's gonna do it (God's gonna do it)
God's gonna do it (God's gonna do it)
I said God's gonna do it (God's gonna do it)
Yes he brought me out

The vocals fade but the band keeps playing at a softer volume.

12

I don't want this body no more
Done with it
Don't want nothin to do with living inside of it
Don't need it no more
Don't want it no more
What's the point of putting me here if you can't keep me safe?
What's the point of having a body that don't feel like home no more?
What's the point of having a home if somebody always breaks in?
I don't want this body no more

12

So you can take it back
And give me a new one
That I can feel safe in
That I can call home again
But I don't want this body no more

ROTTWEILER

Run!

Blackout.

PART 2

Sundown. Jogging toward Manhattan. Two minutes pass.

NAT

You / sure?

12

Yes.

NAT

Okay.

Thirty seconds pass.

NAT

But like

12

Shut up.

NAT

Okay.

Thirty seconds pass.

NAT

Yo why are we

12

I said shut up.

NAT

I wasn't talking to you.

12

Well still, stop talking.

NAT

I'm asking the dog a question.

12

She won't answer you.

NAT

You don't know that.

12

Just shut up.

NAT

Okay.

Thirty seconds pass.

12

God said run.

NAT

Me?

12

God.

NAT

No, I mean you're talking to me?

12

Yes.

NAT

Oh!

12

Yeah.

NAT

God?

12

Yes.

NAT

Which one?

12

From the Bible.

NAT

Oh...

How do you know?

12

The dog.

NAT

What about the dog?

12

Speaks the Bible.

NAT

Hey, say something

12

No.

NAT

What?

NAT
Why?

12
You don't ask God to speak.

NAT
I did.

12
And it didn't work.

NAT
It did

12
It didn't.

NAT
It worked.

12
You died.

NAT
We all do.

12
Early.

NAT
We all do.

12
With a noose.

NAT
We all

12
No.
Not anymore.

NAT
Okay.

Twenty seconds pass. They start walking.

NAT
when?

12
what?

NAT
did God say run

12
earlier today

NAT
hmmm

12
at church

NAT
makes sense

12
yeah

NAT

you were praying?

12

kinda

NAT

kinda?

12

yeah

NAT

how do you kinda pray?

12

easy

NAT

how?

12

close your eyes

NAT

that's it?

12

yup

NAT

oh

12

yeah

NAT
okay

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT
Why did God tell you to run?

12
I don't know.

NAT
Are we running from something?

12
Or towards something, not sure yet.

NAT
Okay word.

12
I had the thought before.

NAT
But?

12
It was a thought.

NAT
And now?

12
A pull.

NAT

Or push.

12

Right.

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

I really want to hear the dog speak.

12

Why?

NAT

It's been a while.

12

Since you've heard the voice of God?

NAT

Yes.

12

You sure you heard it the first time?

NAT

Positive.

Ten seconds pass.

12

What do you think about piano keys?

NAT

I don't.

12

Okay well try.

He thinks about piano keys.

NAT

Black and white.

12

That's it?

NAT

It's my first time thinking about them.

12

Probably not.

NAT

It is!

12

Try again.

He thinks about piano keys.

NAT

Oh it's more like dancing.

12

Yeah that's what I was thinking.

NAT

The music already exists

Piano keys respond to the music that's already there.

12

That's what I was thinking.

NAT

So where does it come from then?

12

What?

NAT

Music.

12

Oh yes that's what I was thinking.

I don't know.

NAT

Maybe God.

12

Yeah maybe God.

Their walking slows. Fifteen seconds pass.

12

And money?

NAT

What about it?

12

What do you think?

NAT

Why are we thinking about money and piano keys?

12

Because.

NAT

That's a bad answer.

12

Because!

NAT

Why?

12

What do *you* think?

NAT

I think maybe the whole world was built with piano keys and money.

12

That's what I was thinking.

NAT

Which world?

12

This one, I think.

NAT

I think so too.

12

I think maybe that's what I'm running from.

NAT

We.

12

Yeah.

NAT

Or towards.

12

No from.

NAT

Not towards?

12

I don't think so.

NAT

Is it possible to escape?

12

I don't think so.

NAT

Why?

12

I feel it all inside now too.

NAT

So why are we running?

12

Because.

God said run.

They begin to jog again. Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

Will we ever stop?

12

Running?

NAT

Running.

12

Maybe.

NAT

If?

12

Not sure.

NAT

Okay.

12

You don't want to run?

NAT

Not for no reason.

12

We got a reason.

NAT

I know, but

12

God said run.

NAT

I know, but

12

So we run.

NAT

But!

12

What?

NAT

How do you know, for certain, that it was God said run?

12

I told you.

NAT

Yeah, but

12

I told you!

NAT

Devil sounds like God too!

12

Don't say that.

NAT

True, though.

12

I know what I heard.

NAT

Okay.

12

Didn't you?

NAT

Yes.

12

Okay, well me too.

NAT

Okay.

Thirty seconds pass. They start walking.

12

What about the sky?

NAT

Are we thinking again?

12

Yes.

NAT

I've thought about the sky.

12

What did you think when you thought about it?

NAT

It's like heaven's curtain.

12

That's not what I was thinking.

NAT

What were you thinking?

12

Not that.

NAT

Then what?

12

The sky is the saddest place in the world.

NAT

Why?

12

It catches so many tears and wishes.

NAT

Why is that sad?

12

Because it can't give nothing back.

NAT

Oh.

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

It rains.

12
Oh.

NAT
Like tears.

12
Right.

NAT
Maybe that's why rain is sad.

12
That's what I was thinking.

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT
Where are we?

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT
Where are we?

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT
Are you okay?

12 starts to pull at her skin.

NAT
What's wrong?

12
It's all stuck inside.

NAT

last night?

12

what?

NAT

never mind

Ten seconds pass.

12

Running isn't working.

NAT

Maybe you were wrong.

12

It was God.

NAT

No, not that.

12

He said run.

NAT

Not that!

12

What then?

NAT

Maybe it is towards.

12

Towards what?

NAT

Not sure.

12

But not from?

NAT

Maybe not.

12

Oh.

NAT

We could think about it.

12

I don't know where to start.

NAT

With where we are.

12

Okay.

NAT

Where are we?

12

Brooklyn.

NAT

Still?

12

I think.

NAT

We already passed the museum.

12

But not too long ago.

NAT

Oh.

12

And besides, the bridge.

NAT

Right, right.

They begin to jog again. 15 seconds pass.

12

I think I'm afraid of water.

NAT

Then don't think about it.

15 seconds pass.

12

But we still have to cross over the bridge.

NAT

Don't think about it yet.

15 seconds pass.

12

But once we're there

NAT

We'll cross it.

15 seconds pass.

12

I think I've heard that before.

NAT

You think too much.

12

Only way to keep from feeling too much.

NAT

You feel a lot?

12

The whole world.

NAT

Wow.

12

Whole mountains.

Every sea.

The icebergs.

The Nile.

NAT

What about

12

The whole world.

NAT

Even the people?

12

Especially.

NAT

What?

12

The people.

NAT

Oh.

They start walking. Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

I'm sorry.

12

Why?

NAT

Must be heavy.

12

Sometimes.

NAT

I'm sorry.

12

Don't be.

NAT

Why?

12

Don't like the sound of it.

NAT

What?

12

Sorry.

NAT

Oh.

12

Don't sound good.

NAT

Okay.

12

Don't taste good.

NAT

Right.

12

Say thank you.

NAT

Huh?

12

Instead.

NAT

Oh.

Okay.

Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

Thank you for carrying the whole world and all the people with you.

Thank you for feeling it all the time.

Thank you for taking on all that weight.

Fifteen seconds pass.

12

You're welcome.

12-Year-Old Black Girl and her dog begin to run again.

Nat Turner also runs, he's just a bit behind. Thirty seconds pass.

NAT

Think you still need me?

12

Huh?

NAT

You still need me?

12

I never needed you.

You slow me down.

NAT

But you made me come.

They stop running and begin walking.

12

What are you talking about?

NAT

Do you still believe that you need me here with you?

12

You're not making sense.

NAT

I'm Nat Turner.

12

I know.

NAT

I died in 1831.

12

I know.

NAT

Well then how am I here?

12

I don't know, stop asking me questions.

NAT

I'm not.

12

Asking me questions?

NAT

Here.

12

What?

NAT

I'm not here.

12

Yes, you are.

NAT

I'm not.

12

I see you.

I hear you.

You been driving me crazy for hours.

NAT

Well I think I need to leave now.

12

Why?

NAT

I don't think you need me here.

12

It's not like you've been much help.

NAT

I'm leaving

12

Wait.

NAT

It's time.

12

Why?

NAT

You're almost at the bridge.

12

So?

NAT

So it's just you and the dog now.

12

Just wait.

NAT

Ghosts can only help you find direction, not substance.

12

I have a question.

NAT

You've asked many.

12

One last one.

NAT

You sure?

12

Yes, can I ask?

NAT

Of course.

12

Why did you destroy your world?

ROTTWEILER

Run.

12

What?

NAT

I didn't say anything.

ROTTWEILER

Run!

They begin to run. Fifteen seconds pass.

NAT

I had a vision...

ROTTWEILER

Run!

NAT

I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle...

ROTTWEILER

Run!

NAT

And the sun was darkened...

ROTTWEILER

Run!

NAT

Thunder rolled in the heavens and blood flowed in the streams...

ROTTWEILER

Run!

NAT

And I heard a voice saying...

Five seconds pass.

12

What?

Five seconds pass.

12

What did it say?

Five seconds pass.

12

What did the voice say?!

Nat Turner is gone. 12-Year-Old Black Girl notices. She stops running. Twenty seconds pass.

ROTTWEILER

Such is your luck.

Such you are called to see.

And, let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bear it.

12-Year-Old Black Girl sits down next to her dog and pets her a bit.

12

Well, we made it to the bridge.

10 seconds pass. The most perfect silence.

12

Now what?

I'm afraid of wherever we're going.

Ten seconds pass.

12

Nat said that we should cross it.

Ten seconds pass.

12

But something makes sense just sitting here on the edge.

Ten seconds pass.

12

I don't know what to do...

In a whisper:

ROTTWEILER

Run.

Ten seconds pass.

ROTTWEILER

Run!

She stands. Slowly takes her first step onto the bridge. Begins to walk. To jog. To run. Manhattan's lights swallow the girl's universe.

PART 3

An alley in the lower eastside. Dog and 12-Year-Old-Black-Girl and Alley Fire Woman are in a face off.

WOMAN

State your business.

12

What?

WOMAN

Why are you here?

12

Why you gotta know?

WOMAN

Because this is my alley.

12

No it's not.

WOMAN

This is my alley.

12

Bet you don't even pay taxes.

WOMAN

Who are your parents?

They never taught you how to speak to your elders?

12

They taught me to not trust nobody.

Not even some raggedy old lady in an alley in Manhattan.

Pause.

WOMAN

Fair.

Pause.

12

So just move.

WOMAN

You trusting me or not got nothing to do with me moving.

Like I said, this is my alley and I'm not moving for some rude lil girl.

12

I need to get through and you and your trashcan are in the way.

WOMAN

Where are you trying to go?

12

I'm not telling you nothing.

Just move so we can get through.

WOMAN

Aren't you cold?

Pause.

12

Yes...

WOMAN

I've got fire.

12

I see that.

WOMAN

I'm willing to share.

12

Just move.

WOMAN

I'm trying to be a good host.

12

Don't you see that I've got a Rottweiler?
Move or we'll make you move.

WOMAN

That dog is harmless.

12

This dog will kill you if you don't move.

WOMAN

So *that's* your plan?
Threaten your way to wherever you're trying to go?

12

I don't have a plan
Just know I gotta keep moving.
So move, so I can *keep moving*.

WOMAN

Let's make a deal.

12

Hell no.

WOMAN

Why not?

12

Already told you.

I don't trust no raggedy alley woman.

WOMAN

Why do you have to trust me to make a deal with me?

12

How else I know you'll uphold your end of the deal?

WOMAN

You don't.

12

Exactly.

So I'm not making no deal.

WOMAN

Don't you trust yourself?

12

What are you trying to do?

WOMAN

It's a simple question

Don't you trust yourself?

Pause.

12

Yes.

WOMAN

So don't you trust yourself to make a good deal.

12

Yes.

WOMAN

So don't you trust yourself to figure it out if I don't uphold my end of the deal?

12

Yes.

WOMAN

Here, let's try this again.

When I ask you to make a deal, you ask me to tell you more about the deal.

Pause.

WOMAN

Let's make a deal.

Pause.

12

What type of deal?

WOMAN

See that's the right way to respond.

Okay, I'll let you pass, once you've mastered the element of fire.

Pause.

12

What?

WOMAN

I'll let you pass / once you've

12

I heard you.

12

I mean what the hell are you talking about?

You sound like a crazy hippy

WOMAN

What do you know about fire, girl?

12

I don't know

It burns stuff, it's powerful, dangerous

I don't know

WOMAN

Clearly.

12

What?

WOMAN

You don't know.

12

Oh.

WOMAN

Fire is the element of recovery.

12

Okay.

WOMAN

Fire brings life.

12

Okay.

WOMAN

Fire is the element of freedom and desire.

12

Yo, you're crazy.

WOMAN

Oh so we're back to being rude again?

12

You ask me to make a deal, I don't even know you.

All I'm tryna do is get through this alley

And you're out here talking about mastering fire and freedom and making deals.

Coming at me with all this crazy talk.

WOMAN

Find another alley then.

12

Come on, just move.

WOMAN

you accept my deal?

12

I'm not making no deal with no crazy ass woman i never met.

WOMAN

you got a mouth, huh?

12

my mom says that

WOMAN

you talk to your mother like that?

12

yeah well, no i don't have to tell you nothing

WOMAN

that's true.

12

so just move.

WOMAN

what's the rush?

12

I'm running from something.

WOMAN

not towards it?

12

no, from it.

WOMAN

how do you know? sometimes we forget why we're running.

12

i already worked it out in my head.

WOMAN

oh yeah?

12

yeah did a lot of thinking already.

WOMAN

and you've made up your mind?

12
yes.

WOMAN
that's a big thing to think about all by yourself.

12
i wasn't by myself.

WOMAN
oh no?

12
got my dog and a friend sometimes

WOMAN
who's your friend?

12
i don't have to tell you nothing.

WOMAN
that's true.

a spark, internal

12
his name is Nat

WOMAN
just Nat?

12
yeah.

WOMAN

is it short for something?

12

i don't know.

WOMAN

does he have a last name?

12

yeah.

WOMAN

hmm

12

not telling you though.

WOMAN

why not?

12

you won't believe me

WOMAN

how do you know?

12

don't nobody believe nothing i say

WOMAN

well good thing i'm somebody

12

what?

WOMAN

it was a joke

12

i don't get it

WOMAN

well you said 'nobody' so i was joking by saying

12

not a joke if only you laugh

WOMAN

hmm.

12

see i'm not dumb

WOMAN

now who said you were dumb?

12

saw it on your face

WOMAN

you saw dumb on my face?

12

stop making jokes that aren't funny

WOMAN

i apologize.

12

whatever.

a few moments, a spark, internal

12

Turner.

WOMAN

what?

12

Turner.

WOMAN

oh!

12

see, knew it

WOMAN

what?

12

you don't believe me, think i'm dumb

WOMAN

i do not think you're dumb

12

whatever

WOMAN

i believe you.

12

so i guess you're crazy too then

WOMAN
yeah maybe

12
see

WOMAN
but you aren't.

12
i talk to Nat Turner.

WOMAN
and i sing to fire.

12
that don't make you crazy, just makes you weird

WOMAN
so then why does talking to Nat Turner make you crazy?

12
he's dead

WOMAN
says who?

12
books

WOMAN
which ones?

12
i don't know history

WOMAN

no one's really dead

12

i know, their memory lives on

WOMAN

i guess

12

but i don't remember Nat, he died a while ago, before i was born

WOMAN

memory is just a dream that pretends to have happened

12

that don't even make sense

WOMAN

you'll understand eventually

12

don't do that.

WOMAN

don't do what?

12

talk like everybody else

WOMAN

okay

12

talk like life only makes sense to old people

WOMAN

okay

12

i'm only talking to you because you weren't doing that

WOMAN

i'm sorry

12

don't do that again

WOMAN

i won't

12

i'll leave

WOMAN

i know.

a few moments, the woman puts an all white american flag into her fire

WOMAN

i meant that time isn't a straight line

12

what?

WOMAN

when i said no one is really dead

12

what do you mean?

WOMAN

everything exists within the moment between life and death

12

you really are crazy

WOMAN

you believe in God?

12

of course, my dog speaks the bible

WOMAN

well then you understand what it means to have faith

12

yeah?

WOMAN

faith is trusting without proof, knowing without knowing

12

yeah

WOMAN

well you talk to Nat Turner, don't you?

12

yeah

WOMAN

and you know he's dead

12

yeah

WOMAN

and you know you're talking to him

12

yeah

WOMAN

so have some faith

a moment

WOMAN

i have faith in you

12

you don't know me

WOMAN

exactly

12

that wasn't another bad joke, right?

WOMAN

no it wasn't

12

okay, good

a moment, the woman puts a bundle of sugar cane in her fire

WOMAN

besides, i know a girl with a spark when i see one

12

spark?

WOMAN

why you think i keep talking to you about fire?

12

because you're some sort of pyro i guess

WOMAN

well that might be true but got nothing to do with your spark

12

what spark?

WOMAN

one that could burn down a whole universe

12

stop talking all big

WOMAN

okay

12

stop talking in metaphors

WOMAN

i will

12

good

ROTTWEILER

run...

12

what?

WOMAN

what?

12

'run'

WOMAN

i didn't say that

12

did you hear it?

WOMAN

i wasn't listening for it

12

oh

WOMAN

were you?

12

i don't think so

ROTTWEILER

run...

12

did you hear it that time?

WOMAN

i told you i wasn't listening for it

12

well listen for it!

WOMAN

okay

they wait, a while

12

you messed it up

WOMAN

is it God?

12

yes kinda

WOMAN

hmm

12

i told you, my dog speaks the bible

WOMAN

what verse says run?

12

i don't know

WOMAN

hmm

12

why do you do that?

ROTTWEILER

run...

12
you heard it?

WOMAN
i didn't

12
you're supposed to be listening!

WOMAN
are you sure it's God?

12
yes you sound like you're gonna start talking to me like i don't know stuff again

WOMAN
i won't

12
don't.

WOMAN
did it say what you're running to?

12
no

WOMAN
or from?

12
no

WOMAN
well maybe that's the point

12

what is?

WOMAN

maybe it's neither

12

huh?

WOMAN

towards or from

12

oh then what?

WOMAN

with?

12

with what?

WOMAN

well

12

well?

WOMAN

maybe it's fire

12

you're just saying that

WOMAN

maybe this isn't an accident

12

you're just saying that

WOMAN

maybe you were running from something
 and then you started running toward something
 and maybe you arrived
 and maybe you're not supposed to run from something anymore
 and maybe you're not supposed to run toward something
 and maybe you were supposed to run here
 and maybe you stopped and turned down this alley because you needed to
 and maybe you're supposed to learn to run with something
 and maybe that something is fire
 and maybe i'm your angel
 or maybe i'm the devil
 or maybe i'm something from that moment between life and death
 and maybe i can teach you how to master the element of fire

ROTTWEILER

run...

12

no!

WOMAN

what?

12

okay.

WOMAN

what?

12

teach me.

WOMAN
are you sure?

12
no and yes

WOMAN
hmm

12
faith

WOMAN
okay

12
so teach me

WOMAN
okay

12
go ahead

WOMAN
you're still running towards something

12
okay

WOMAN
stop

12
but God said run

WOMAN

but he didn't say to what or from what

12

okay

WOMAN

so stop trying to run into what hasn't happened or from what has

12

then what?

WOMAN

just run

12

how?

WOMAN

with smoke in your belly

12

i don't know how to do that

WOMAN

look at your fear in the face

12

what fear?

WOMAN

the one that has you running

12

but God said run

WOMAN

but that's not why you've been running

a moment

12

it's got the ugliest face

WOMAN

i know, but its the only way to fill your belly with smoke

12

okay

WOMAN

and that's the only way to master fire

12

okay

WOMAN

close your eyes

12

i don't want to

WOMAN

try

12

i still don't trust you

WOMAN

your dog will protect you

12

i know

WOMAN

so try

12

okay

she closes her eyes

ROTTWEILER

run...

she opens her eyes again

12

i heard it again

WOMAN

that's okay, try again

12

but what if i hear it again?

WOMAN

try keeping your eyes closed

12

okay

she closes her eyes again

ROTTWEILER

run...

12

i heard it again

WOMAN
that's okay

she puts a pearl necklace in the fire

ROTTWEILER
run...

12
i heard it again

WOMAN
try looking your fear in the face

12
i'm trying

WOMAN
breathe

she starts to slow her breath and breathe more deeply

ROTTWEILER
run...

WOMAN
remember that everything exists in the moment between life and death

ROTTWEILER
run...

WOMAN
remember the bridges you've crossed and the currents that never swallowed you up

ROTTWEILER
run...

12
my belly feels warm

WOMAN
good, keep breathing

ROTTWEILER
run...

WOMAN
deep breaths

ROTTWEILER
run...

WOMAN
keep breathing

12
i feel it

WOMAN
good, keep breathing

12
its face is melting

WOMAN
deep breaths

ROTTWEILER
run...

12
i can feel the smoke in my belly

WOMAN

open your eyes

she does

WOMAN

how do you feel?

12

warm

WOMAN

is that all?

12

baptized

WOMAN

what does that feel like?

12

like life and death at the same time

A moment passes.

WOMAN

its time for your phoenix feathers

its time to burn last night into dust

its time to burn the memories all trapped on the inside

ROTTWEILER

run...

12

i hear it

WOMAN
that's okay

12
what should i do?

WOMAN
run

12
you sure?

WOMAN
of course not

12
okay

WOMAN
run!

12
okay...

WOMAN
and let the world burn beneath your wings

she runs, her dog follows, the woman steps into her fire.

PART 4

Nat Turner is back. He sings the gospel. He hums when he's not singing. The organ continuously pours up from the soil. Only 12 is running this time. The stage is on fire. The stage is actually on fire.

She jogs.

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire.

The projects are on fire.

The capitol is on fire.

The mountains that spine their way between the fentanyl needles of Vermont and Georgia are on fire.

The Brooklyn crack pipes are on fire.

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Yes)*

12

Run

ROTTWEILER

The ethereal stuff of stars and heaven swirl tireless in the minds of crown heights kids with box braids and ancestors whose bones are sprinkled into London tea cups, daily. The knowledge of earth loving soil sweat mud making deep in the marrow of Brownsville mothers and grandmothers.

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Yes)*

12

Run

ROTTWEILER

Hey girl, remember the smell of mama's oxtail and rice and peas?

Hey girl, remember that time you scraped your knee up bad when you were biking?

Hey girl, remember, I'm just a dog.

Hey girl, remember I speak the Bible.

Hey girl, remember that time you slept over at your cousins house?

12

Run

ROTTWEILER

Remember the smell of your aunty's throw pillows and the smell of grandpa smoking weed in his bedroom?

Remember your best friend Ayanna who you call your twin even though she's in the grade above you?

Remember that time you failed that test or the test you might be failing right now or how you've failed to realize that its all a test or that you're tested so that you can realize your full potential?

12

Run

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire

And your dad has another family

And you don't remember what silence sounds like and its all trapped on the inside.

12

Run

NAT

You've been building your kingdom

All over this land

Satan, we're gonna tear

Your kingdom down

ROTTWEILER

Strength comes up bubbling like surface puddle ripples
 tripping up the status quotient of sons and daughters
 on rikers island and every other concrete plantation
 plantains replaced with government mush
 and fbi secret recipes
 cooking up something nasty to distribute
 the war on drugs and cousins bubbling in the pot
 up to the surface until the truth surfaces and upsets the balance
 the in between numbers written on sticky notes in DOJ pockets
 the rocket men and women of the future have been chained to the ground
 like your neighbor myles and the way they stuck their knees in his back.

12

Run, and keep running, and run

ROTTWEILER

angels carry swords of fire
 thats not a metaphor
 angels carry swords of fire

12

Run and run and run and run

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
 Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down (oh Yes)*

ROTTWEILER

he said it wasn't weird
 he said it was normal
 that feeling weird about it was weird
 that feeling uncomfortable wasn't normal
 but you know stuff
 and you know how you feel

ROTTWEILER

and how you don't want to feel or be felt
 and you know it was weird
 and you know it wasn't normal
 and he ain't nothing to run for
 or from
 or towards
 but, still, you are strong, and you

12

Run

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire
 and so is Central Park
 and soon every wall street white-collar will smoke
 and the smell of burning cotton will suffocate them and the souls of their ancestors
 that is not a metaphor
 not a threat
 or a promise to be kept
 but a chain reaction
 Newton's third law resurfacing
 and crumbling manhattan concrete

12

Run

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
 Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down (oh Yes)*

ROTTWEILER

Noah's ark would be burning
 there's no room for more than one
 there's only room enough for those whose souls are like feathers,

ROTTWEILER

not incased in organs or blood but on the surface and colorful
 delicate and stronger than humanly possible,
 defying earth and air and water and ether and even laughter
 but precariously perched like icarus moments before he became a lesson
 existing in all the moments between life and death,
 infinite and already gone like stars and planets
 fiery bodies of universes, milky way stuffed and garnished with grey matter

12

Run

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
 All over this land
 Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

Dear daddy,
 you running from yourself has nothing to do with me
 you have nothing to do with me
 you want nothing to do with me?
 you have nothing to do for me?
 you want me to have nothing?
 you have nothing i want anyway
 and any way you wanting anything to do with me is guilt filled and nothing real
 and you are nothing to run for
 or from
 or towards
 but central park is on fire and i'm gonna

12

Run

NAT

*The preachers are gonna preach
Your kingdom down
The preachers are gonna preach
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire
and so is Central Park
lined with angels with blazed sabers
and phoenix feathers falling like November leaves
and the clouds are holy smoke
from burning bushes and parted ocean crossings
star crossed lovers wishes raining down on Sunday evenings
earth quaking under the weight of sky scraping super banks
corporal corporate sacrifices to invisible deities

12

run

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
All over this land
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

Hey girl, remember that time you slept over at your cousins house?

12

run

ROTTWEILER

Hey girl, remember that time you slept over at your cousins house?

12

run

ROTTWEILER

Hey girl, remember that time you slept over at your cousins house?

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
All over this land
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire
and smoke is a signal
and the Amazon is on fire
and smoke is a signal so

12

run, run, run

NAT

*The mothers are gonna pray
Your kingdom down
The Mothers are gonna pray
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

the clouds are the loudest on sunday mornings
sounding boards for last hopes and petty revenge plots
echoing back the sadness of a billion brown boys and girls
winds picking up and pushing forward and round in circles
the epicenter needle thick and lost in wheat fields filled with mice
and the last remains of soil life on the great plains
and the rain is acid, always, but on sunday mornings the ph balances a little bit more
until the lightning strikes twice through the hearts of grandmothers
with grandsons with guns and grudges

12

run

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
All over this land
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

sometimes you wonder why
but that why-wondering becomes a hamster wheel
and torture device
spinning for what forever feels like
stuck still and exhausted and unsure how to escape
and their faces flash
over and over
and over and over
and over
until you begin to

12

run

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Yes)
You've been building your kingdom
All over this land
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

Can you feel that?
The rumble?
The revolution?
The rumble of another revolution around the sun?
The sun combusting through the underworld?
The rumble of the world beneath your feet?

ROTTWEILER

The hunger and hustle of us underlings?

The stomach gutting, gut grumble?

Can you feel that?

The ash?

The bits of dust unsettled?

Your lungs collapsing?

Your heart expanding?

Your mind expanding?

The hive expanding?

Can you feel that?

The Brooklyn hustle?

The 3 train stinking deep?

The Bushwick boogie?

The Crown Heights hellfire?

The Brownsville get-down?

The Canarsie catwalk?

The Flatbush fire sirens?

The Bed Stuy bullies?

That East New York ecstasy?

Can you feel that?

Can you feel that?

If you feel that

When you feel that

12

run

NAT

The deacons are gonna pray

Your kingdom down

The deacons are gonna pray

Your kingdom down

ROTTWEILER

The Amazon is on fire

and Central Park is on fire

ROTTWEILER

and like sisters they dance
 and destroy what was
 and create what will be
 existing precisely between
 the last second and the next one

12

run, run, run, run, run

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
 All over this land
 Satan, we're gonna tear
 Your kingdom down*

ROTTWEILER

Take back your body
 Reclaim your home
 Burn it to the ground
 and to the ashes add water
 and with the clay make a brick
 and another
 and another
 until the bricks are thousands and dried
 Lay them in the soil
 deep deep
 root deep
 and on the surface too
 through every layer of the mantle
 Build
 brick by brick
 but leave space for the air
 let the wind fill the cracks and pores and doors and windows
 Do not build a roof
 let the stars tell you when its time to sleep

ROTTWEILER

Listen

and sleep in peace in your new home of fire and water and earth and air

She stops running.

12

The Amazon is on fire

NAT

*Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Lord)
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down (oh Yes)*

12

Take back your body

Reclaim your home

Burn it to the ground

and to the ashes add water

and with the clay make a brick

and another

and another

until the bricks are thousands and dried

Lay them in the soil

deep deep

root deep

and on the surface too

through every layer of the mantle

Build

brick by brick

but leave space for the air

let the wind fill the cracks and pores and doors and windows

Do not build a roof

let the stars tell you when its time to sleep

Listen

and sleep in peace in your new home of fire and water and earth and air

NAT

*You've been building your kingdom
All over this land
Satan, we're gonna tear
Your kingdom down*

12

The Amazon is on fire
and so is Central Park
but I am the Phoenix
and that's not a metaphor
I am the Phoenix and this is my fire
And this is my body
and these are my bones
and this is my hair
and these are my hands
and this is my home
and this is my fire
and this is my fire
and this is my fire
and this is the moment between life and death
and these are my flames

a moment

12

The Amazon is on fire.

*Nat and Rottweiler are gone.
The organ swells, crescendos.
The lights dim to black, slowly; slowly; like the last ember, as the flames swallow the stage.*

end of play.