

HOMELESS NOT HELPLESS

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A Play in Two Acts

by

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## SYNOPSIS

Homeless, the unseen; the working poor living in plain sight. Maddy's family, comprised of five women of all ages from all walks of life and all manner of homelessness, have banded together to survive the streets. They work hard but cannot afford a home or the trappings of even a meager life without living together under an overpass. They survive and thrive as underpassers. These strong women embrace their lives as having a roof over their heads, tents to sleep in, jobs to go to, and food on their table. Enter Cherry. Cherry, a bright, smart, naïve fifteen year-old-girl, has been attacked and thrown away on the same day one of Maddy's family has been viciously murdered. The family is torn between helping Cherry, forcing her out, and getting revenge for the loss of their beloved Shaniqua. Cherry brings a fresh inventiveness to living as an underpasser. Brutal truths and horrors are exposed threatening to shred the thin cord that binds this family together. These women live a hard life, but heroism is found in a form we're not accustomed to seeing; in a place where we're not accustomed to seeing it. Love, character, and strong faith undergird Maddy's family as they rise above poverty and life on the streets.

## LOGLINE

Homeless, the unseen; the working poor living in plain sight. Maddy's family, comprised of five women of all ages from all walks of life and all manner of homelessness, have banded together to survive the streets. These women live a hard life, but heroism is found in a form we're not accustomed to seeing; in a place where we're not accustomed to seeing it.

## Cast of Characters

- MADDY: Late 60's. White. Thick Appalachian dialect. Champion of homeless and the lost women. Strong, very religious. Wise. Not well educated. Wields a bat like a second arm. Her hands are burn scared. 22+ years homeless.
- CHERRY: 15. Race open. Small frightened, lost girl. Highly intelligent. A virgin facing homelessness through abuse.
- TILLY: 67. Race open. Hard-working, strong. She's been beaten so badly she can't talk right. Homeless for twenty years, Tilly relies on MADDY for everything. Fiercely loyal she would die for her family.
- MAKAYLA SHANIQUA: 27. Black. A lot of pent up anger as MAKAYLA. She has a long visible scar on her face. Perhaps one eye clouded. SHANIQUA is a quirky queen of the dumpster divers. Sings badly and thinks she is a performer. Wears a crown and long dreadlocks. Colorfully dressed.
- CARMEN: 22. Hispanic. Best friend of MAKAYLA. Admires MAKAYLA and wants to be like her. She is streetwise and speaks Spanglish when she wants to make a point. Carmen is a lost soul.
- ROSIE: 17. Asian. Tiny and vulnerable. She's a cutter. Rescued from a pimp by Maddy. Her self-worth is nothing. She uses Carmen and Makayla for their strength.
- JETT PIMP: 23. Race open. JETT: Strong, evil, gang member. PIMP: different look and voice.
- BYSTANDER ANTOINE: Late 20's. Race open. As BYSTANDER, he is non-descript. ANTOINE: He is evil and has a different look and voice.

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

**The dialects in this play are open to the actor's interpretation.**

Scene

Under a bridge in Los Angeles.

Time

Present.

Scenes

Act I

Scene 1	Street and alley	Late morning.
Scene 2	Under a bridge	Noon same day.
Scene 3	Under a bridge	Evening the same day.
Scene 4	Under a bridge	2 AM same day.

INTERMISSION

Act II

Scene 1	Under a bridge	A few minutes later.
Scene 2	Under a bridge	Several nights later. Evening.
Scene 3	Street and alley	Several minutes later.

ACT I

## Scene 1

SETTING:

An alley and street in front of the main set. Late morning. A wall that angles off upstage right is attached to a wall parallel to the arch. Graffiti covers the bricks. A partial pink sign can be seen 'PUSSYCAT CLUB'. In the middle of the ally is a dumpster. Garbage bags are against it. A small stool is next to the dumpster. Inside is a chair that is still usable. Inside there are some trashed items SHANIQUA can throw out.

AT RISE:

Downstage from the dumpster is JETT. He is asleep. Next to him are a bag and a radio. SHANIQUA is in the dumpster. She wears fairly clean old clothes and a hand-made crown. She is inside the dumpster singing and tossing items out. CHERRY enters upstage right scared and disgusted to see someone in the dumpster. She holds her nose with one hand and hugs her backpack with the other.

SHANIQUA

I'S SHANIQUA CAIN'T YOU SEE  
 QUEEN A DA STREETS, DAT BE ME!  
 FINDIN', HUNTIN'. FIXIN' TOO  
 GOT GOOD TRASH I TAKES FROM YOU!

(to CHERRY)

Yo, girlie! How 'bout helping da queen out?

(CHERRY ignores her.)

SHANIQUA (CONT'D)

A single buck Shaniqua ax't of thee.  
 Queen a da dumpsters, can't you see?

CHERRY

(holds pack tighter)

Huh?

SHANIQUA

You got any scryll? Dead presidents? Bank?

(slowly)

Mon-nay.

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CHERRY

No, sorry.

SHANIQUA

You not fakin' jacks, is you?

CHERRY

What does that mean?

SHANIQUA

Wanna buy a shirt? Got a real sparkler just for you!

CHERRY

No. I... I don't have anything but books. I've gotta go.

SHANIQUA

Shaniqua the queen, my voice is a dream. A watch or a ring  
I sing for bling!

(CHERRY runs off.)

SHANIQUA (CONT'D)

Hey girly, don't be rushing off!

(SHANIQUA sings as she pulls out a well-worn but usable chair dropping it outside of the dumpster. SHANIQUA climbs out and inspects the chair. She grabs all but one trash bag and throws them back in the dumpster. She takes the remaining garbage bag and the chair and walks towards JETT. TILLY rounds the corner. SHANIQUA, spying the radio, quietly takes it and starts to walk off. JETT wakes and jumps to his feet.)

JETT

(pulls out a gun)

Fucking skank! You thiefin' me?

SHANIQUA

Be easy! Just lookin' fo' some tunes!

I'S SHANIQUA CAIN'T YOU SEE  
QUEEN A DA STREETS, DAT BE ME!

(SHANIQUA puts the radio down, turns to walk away.)

SHANIQUA (CONT'D)  
FINDIN', HUNTIN'. FIXIN' TOO  
GOT GOOD TRASH...

(JETT shoots SHANIQUA in the  
back. TILLY screams as  
JETT picks up the radio.)

JETT

Nobody ganks me!

(JETT runs towards TILLY  
pointing the gun at her.  
TILLY crouches, covering  
her head as a BYSTANDER  
hollers from off stage.)

BYSTANDER (off)

Hey!! I'm calling the cops!

JETT

(to TILLY with his back  
to BYSTANDER)

You bes' keep steppin' or you gets smoked! My boys find  
you...

(gun to TILLY's head)

...you be dead!

(JETT runs and disappears.  
TILLY rushes to SHANIQUA  
and cradles her head.)

TILLY

Ni'!! Tilly fix. Red, red! Need, get!  
(listens to her breath)

No die!

SHANIQUA

QUEEN...

(SHANIQUA dies. TILLY holds  
SHANIQUA and rocks her  
crying.)

TILLY

Ni', Ni', Ni'. God no take! Love Ni'.

(TILLY prays then puts the  
crown on SHANIQUA'S head.  
TILLY puts a rag on  
SHANIQUA'S face. TILLY turns  
and quickly exits. BYSTANDER  
wearing a hoodie rushes to  
SHANIQUA on the phone.)

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(We do not see BYSTANDER'S  
face.)

BYSTANDER

Yeah, I just saw a girl get murdered! --- Behind the  
Pussycat Club. Hurry!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)



## Act 1

Scene 2SETTING:

Under a bridge noon same day. The backside of the wall from the previous scene is moved to make the stage right wall that angles from upstage right of the stairs to offstage down right. It is painted like concrete under a bridge. Graffiti covers the wall. The homeless camp area lies downstairs under a bridge. The main entrance stairs with railings are upstage right of center. The camp is set up with boxes on wheels, homemade tents, and one fairly decent pop-up tent made of scrim. [Lighting inside the tent for silhouetted scenes.] A broken couch and some chairs are sporadically placed. A board for a table and some crates for chairs are neatly stacked. Downstage left is a large round pylon. Behind the pylon is where the bathroom and kitchen items are kept offstage. The place is swept and clean. A wash or river is where the audience sits.

AT RISE:

MADDY is with CARMEN and ROSIE finishing lunch.

MADDY

Rosie, y'all dun so good! Loves me sum mush melon.

ROSIE

I found a great sale on fruit.

CARMEN

Bread's soft. That's rare!

MADDY

Thank Tilly fer that. She dun finded some day ol' in da trash. Rosie, you git your schoolin' work done?

CARMEN

She all scienced up. Shaniqua the tutor magician.

(ROSIE laughs as CARMEN  
joins in.)

ROSIE

Yeah. Good old Shaniqua taught me how to turn a broken radio into a can of beans. Presto chango, it's all A's from here!

MADDY

She be queen a da dumpster, dat fo' sho'!

(MADDY laughs.)

CARMEN

That's nuthin'! I seen Makayla turn a skinny white dude into an Olympic runner with her mouth!

(All laugh.)

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Never seen legs run that fast!

MADDY

Don't be dawd'lin. Cain't be late fer class.

ROSIE

I don't have to be back 'til two. Carmen, you get to work today?

CARMEN

Na. Mrs. Cummings said tomorrow I get a double.

MADDY

We can use da money.

ROSIE

How much until we can get a place?

MADDY

Gots to git Makayla her surgery den we saves agin.

CARMEN

We get our new digs, I want my own room!  
(pulls out some change and  
bills from her jeans)  
Fundage from last night.

MADDY

You dun good! We be savin' agin soon! So Carmen wants a room. What y'all wants, Rosie?

ROSIE

I'd settle for a shower and a stove.

MADDY

Worshin' in a tub? Land a goshin' I's shor'ly missin' dat!

CARMEN

Hot bites? That's a good one, Rosie. Shaniqua get bank?

MADDY

She dun good too. Thirty-six. Gotst it from her yestiday.

ROSIE

Maddy, I need ten dollars for science class.

(MADDY gives ROSIE a ten.)

MADDY

You best be larnin' sum.

CARMEN

Spot me ten.

MADDY

Rosie need it fer schoolin'. Why you'uns needs money?

ROSIE

Châteauneuf-du-Pape with a screw top.

CARMEN

You narkin' on me? Makayla needs pills. She out.

MADDY

(gives her five dollars)

Sposin' you kin has five... fer pills not fer drinkin'!

CARMEN

Need ten. Pills cost eight.

(MADDY gives her five more.  
CARMEN starts to leave.)

ROSIE

Help me clean up first.

(CARMEN groans then grabs  
something to carry.)

MADDY

I hopes Shaniqua finds a gooder chair. I declare she kin  
find da best stuff.

CARMEN

Tilly got me a blanket. She a'ight.

ROSIE

Makayla left early.

CARMEN

Muy afortunado! Workin' a double. She trying to bring eats.

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MADDY

You'uns worsh-up fer me, please. I gotsta gits me a nap.  
Gots work tonight.

(ROSIE and CARMEN clear the food as MADDY goes into her tent. ROSIE and CARMEN go off left to wash. No one is on stage. CHERRY can be heard yelling and fighting upstairs. CHERRY is chased by PIMP down the stairs and into the camp. He grabs CHERRY and pulls her to him. He forces her to kiss him. CHERRY fights him hard.)

CHERRY

Stop!! Help!! Leave me alone!!

PIMP

You a fine piece a ass!

(PIMP grabs at CHERRY'S clothes. CHERRY fights.)

CHERRY

No!! Leave me alone! Stop!! HELP!

PIMP

Loves a fighter! I break that out of you.

(MADDY charges out of her tent - bat in hand. MADDY yells a frightening yell and starts swinging her bat like a master. MADDY charges the PIMP. PIMP pulls a switchblade. CHERRY cowers behind MADDY.)

PIMP

You wanna play? Come and get some!

(MADDY whistles. ROSIE and CARMEN enter from their hiding place. Each carries a weapon of like a pipe or board or a rock etc.)

CARMEN

Hijo de puta!

(All three charge PIMP.)

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(They swing weapons and yell  
as PIMP runs upstairs. CHERRY,  
relieved, begins to shake.)

MADDY

You best be runnin'! An' don't comes back or 'ol Bessie'll  
lump ya inta tamorra!

(CHERRY, tries to exit.  
CARMEN blocks her.)

CARMEN

Putta, where you think you goin'?

CHERRY

I...maybe...leaving.

MADDY

You ain't goin' nowhere's.

CHERRY

I need to go. Thank you for saving me!

MADDY

A murderin' rapist done just left. You ain't leavin'!

CARMEN

Nuthin' free, chica.

CHERRY

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! What do you want?

CARMEN

What you got in the bag?

CHERRY

Just books.

(CHERRY rifles through her  
backpack shaking. ROSIE  
takes CHERRY'S phone.)

ROSIE

Cell!

CHERRY

Hey! That's my phone, I need that!

ROSIE

Are you a thief?

CHERRY

I didn't steal anything!!

Then what is ya? MADDY

Nobody. I'm lost! CHERRY

Ever body gots a story. MADDY

You run away? ROSIE

Not exactly. CHERRY

Bes' talk fast! MADDY

I got kicked out. CHERRY

MADDY  
(pokes CHERRY with the bat)  
Drugs? Ain't gonna has no druggy here!

CHERRY  
I don't do drugs! I'll just go. Thank you for saving me.  
May I please have my phone back?

ROSIE  
How'd you get here?

CHERRY  
I've just been walking since this morning.

CARMEN  
Scurr out. We don't need no Niña to diaper.

ROSIE  
Where do you live?

CHERRY  
Nowhere now. Bob lied... He's mom's new husband. He said...  
He lied! Mom kicked me out of the house. Please, just give  
me my phone and I'll go.

MADDY  
You one of dem daddy haters?

CHERRY  
He's not my real dad!! Bob tore my shirt and...