



THE MOUNTAINTOP

BY KATORI HALL



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Jean Doumanian, Sonia Friedman Productions, Ambassador Theater Group,
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In addition, the following acknowledgments must appear on the title page in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play:

THE MOUNTAINTOP was developed at the Lark Play Development Center,
New York City, and was first produced by Theatre 503 in June 2009
and further produced at Trafalgar Studio One in July 2009
by Sonia Friedman Productions and Jean Doumanian,
Tali Pelman for Ambassador Theatre Group, Bob Bartner, Freddy DeMann,
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a program of the Playwrights Foundation (Amy L. Mueller, Artistic Director).

THE MOUNTAINTOP received its Broadway premiere at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre on October 13, 2011. It was presented by Jean Doumanian, Sonia Friedman Productions, Ambassador Theater Group, Raise the Roof 7, Ted Snowdon, Alhadeff Productions/Lauren Doll, B Square + 4 Productions/Broadway Across America, Jacki Barlia Florin/Cooper Federman, Ronnie Planalp/Moellenberg Taylor and Marla Rubin Productions/ Blumenthal Performing Arts, in association with Scott Delman. It was directed by Kenny Leon; the music was by Branford Marsalis; the set and projection design were by David Gallo; the costume design was by Constanza Romero; the lighting design was by Brian MacDevitt; the sound design was by Dan Moses Schreier; the hair and wig design were by Charles G. LaPointe; the production manager was Aurora Productions; and the production stage manager was Jimmie Lee Smith. The cast was as follows:

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. Samuel L. Jackson
CAMEA..... Angela Bassett

CHARACTERS

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
CAMAIE

PLACE

Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel.

TIME

April 3, 1968.

THE MOUNTAINTOP

Lights up. Night. April 3, 1968. Room 306. The Lorraine Motel. Memphis, Tennessee. The outside street lights project the shadows of rain sliding down the pane onto the walls.

The motel room door creaks open. The rain pours outside. Enter Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tired. Overwrought. Wet. He is ready to take his shoes off and crawl into bed. He coughs. He is hoarse. He stands in the doorway, the red and yellow motel sign casting a glow onto his face. He yells out of the door into the stormy night.

KING. Abernathy, get me a pack of Pall Malls, when ya go. Naw. Naw. Naw. I said Pall Malls. I don't like those Winstons you smoke. You can call me siddity all you like, I want me a Pall Mall. Pall Malls, man! Don't be cheap. Be back soon, man. I'm wanting one. Bad. That's right ... That's right ... *(He closes the door. He locks the deadbolt. Click. He chains the door. Rattle. Then he pulls the curtain tight over the window. He walks around in the darkness, but he knows the lay of the room well. He turns on a lone lamp that instantly illuminates the room. Water stains pockmark the walls. Bright orange and fading brown '60s decor accent the room. The carpet is the color of bile. He loosens his tie. Unbuttons his shirt. Coughs. An opened briefcase lies on one of the two full beds, covered with ruffled peach sheets. He picks up his sermon papers from the bed. Reading.)* "Why America is going to hell ... " *(He goes into the bathroom.)* "Why America is going to hell ... " *(We hear him urinate. He flushes the toilet. He walks back into the room.)* They really gonna burn me on the cross for that one. *(He turns on a lone lamp that instantly illuminates the room.)* "America, you are too ARROGANT!" *(He goes to the nightstand and checks the empty coffee cups.)* What shall I say ... what shall I say ... *(He goes to the black rotary phone on the nightstand*

between the beds. He dials.) America ... Ameri — *(He stops. In complete silence: unscrews the receiver. Checks the phone for bugs. None there. Screws the receiver back. Checks the nightstand. None there. Sighs. Dials again.)* Room service? There's not any more room service, tonight? When did it stop? Last week? We were here last week and y'all were still serving room service 'til midnight. Been always able to get me a cup of coffee when I wanted it. Needed it. Pardon? I just want a coffee. One cup. *(Pause.)* Thank you! Got to do some work before I go to bed. You can bring it on up. Room 306. *(He smiles a broad smile.)* Yes, we call it the "King-Abernathy Suite," too. I appreciate that, sir. We thank you for your prayers, sir. We're not gonna stop. These sanitation workers gonna get their due. I'm here to make sure of that. Yes, sir! My autograph, sir? *(Beat.)* Uhhhhh ... I don't give those out. I only give thanks. Sorry, sir. Yes. It'll be right up? Five minutes? Thank you kindly. Kindly. *(He hangs up. He gives the phone a "what the fuck was that about" look.)* "America, America, my country 'tis of thee ... " *(He begins to take off his shoes.)* "My country who doles out constant misery — " *(He smells them.)* Woooooh! Sweet Jesus. I got marching feet and we ain't even marched yet! *(He throws them down. He turns to rifle through his suitcase.)* Shit. She forgot to pack my toothbrush again. *(He dials on the rotary phone. Singing to himself.)* Corrie, pick up ... Corrie pick up, Corrie, Corrie, Corrie pick up ... *(She doesn't. He puts the phone down.)* My country who doles out constant misery. War abroad. Then war in your streets. *(Under his breath.)* "Arrogant America." What shall I do with — *(He throws himself back on the bed. There is a knock at the door. He rushes to go and answer. He undoes the deadbolt, then the chain.)* Reverend, about time, man. The store ain't but down the street — *(Enter Camae, a beautiful young maid. She stands in the doorway, one hand holding a newspaper over her head to catch the rain, the other balancing a tray with a cup of coffee.)*

CAMAE. Room service, sir.

KING. That was fast.

CAMAE. Well, I been called quickie Camae befo'. *(He is taken aback, stunned by her beauty. She waits and waits and waits. He snaps out of it.)*

KING. Where are my manners? Come on in. *(He steps aside. She walks in. Dripping over everything.)*

CAMAE. Where would you like me to put this?

KING. On the table over there. *(She sets the tray on the downstage table, bending slightly at the waist. King appreciates his view. Beat. She looks back; he looks away.)* How much is that gonna cost?

CAMAE. Folk down there say it's on the house. For you. It like this yo' house, they say. So you ain't gotta pay them. But you can pay me a tip for gettin' my press 'n' curl wet out in this rain. *(She holds out her hand. He smiles and pulls money from his billfold.)*

KING. You new?

CAMAE. First day, sir.

KING. That's why. I haven't seen you before. Stayed here plenty a' times, but I've never seen your face.

CAMAE. I done seen yo's befo' though.

KING. Oh, have you?

CAMAE. Of course. On the TV down at Woolworth's. You like the Beatles.

KING. Wish folks would listen to me like they listen to the Beatles.

CAMAE. Mm-hm. 'Specially white folks. *(King laughs, then breaks into a fit of coughs.)* Sound like you needin' some tea, not no coffee. You got a cold?

KING. *(Straining.)* Just done got to getting hoarse. Shouting.

CAMAE. And carryin' on.

KING. No, not carrying on. Testifying.

CAMAE. Shame I ain't get a chance to see ya tonight. I heard you carried on a storm up at Mason Temple.

KING. How you know?

CAMAE. Negro talk strike faster than lightnin'. They say folks was all cryin'. Sangin'. Mmph. Mmph. Mmph. I woulda liked to have seen that. Somethin' to tell my chirren. "When I wun't nothin' but a chick-a-dee, I seen't Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr., cuttin' up in the pulpit." Mmmhmmmm. I bet that was somethin' to see. *(King goes to peek out the window.)*

KING. Wish it had been more folks there.

CAMAE. How many was there?

KING. Mmmmmmm. A couple thousand.

CAMAE. Honey, that a lot.

KING. Coulda been more, in my humble opinion.

CAMAE. But it was stormin'. Tornadoes and all get out. You can't get no Negro folks out in no rain like this.

KING. And why is that?

CAMAE. “God’ll strike you down if you move ’round too much.” That what my momma used to say. When it storm like this my momma say, “Be still!” But I thank she just wanted us chirren to sit our tails down somewhere ’cause the lightnain’ spooked her nerves so bad. Personally, I just thank God be actin’ up.

KING. Do He? Is that why you didn’t come? *(Pause. She wants to say something, but changes her mind.)*

CAMAE. Naw. It my first day here. At work. Wanted to come in early.

KING. Well, I can’t blame folks. Shoot, I almost didn’t go.

CAMAE. Why that?

KING. Ain’t been feeling too good.

CAMAE. Aww, a little sick?

KING. You could say that ... Personally, I don’t think God’s what kept folks in their houses tonight. Folks just don’t care.

CAMAE. Folks ’fraid of gettin’ blown up. Churches ain’t even safe for us folks. *(Thunder and lightning. Boom. Boom. Crackle! King jumps slightly.)* You ... alright?

KING. *(Fidgeting.)* Sure ... sure. *(Beat. She goes stage left, she checks the bathroom. Takes some wet towels out and slings them across her shoulder.)*

CAMAE. You need anythang else ’fore I go?

KING. Actually ... if you got a cigarette ...

CAMAE. Cigarettes and coffee? That ain’t a diet befitin’ of a preacher.

KING. “Judge not and ye shall not be judged.”

CAMAE. Honey, I hears that. I guess if you was at home you’d be eatin’ mo’ right.

KING. I suppose.

CAMAE. What you miss the most she make?

KING. Her egg sandwiches.

CAMAE. Mmmmm. I likes them, too. Make one every day for myself. *(She pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Offers him one. He takes it gladly. Looks at it closely. Staring her down, he puts it in his mouth. She takes out a lighter. Lights it for him.)*

KING. Not too many women running ’round smoking Pall Malls. Impressive.

CAMAE. Quite. My daddy smoked Pall Malls. Said Kools’ll kill ya.

KING. Have yourself one.

CAMAE. What?

KING. Smoke one with me.

CAMAE. (*Smiling.*) Naw, naw, Preacher Kang. You 'bout to have my boss up after me. I don't know what the rules is yet. Don't know where the dark corners in this place is to hide and smoke my Pall Malls. Don't even know which rooms to lay my head for a quick nap.

KING. What about this one? (*Beat. She looks at the bed.*)

CAMAE. Last folk up in here was doin' the hoochie-coochie for pay. I wouldn't lay down in that bed if somebody paid me.

KING. So what kinds of rules does a little lady like you break?

CAMAE. None that involve no preacher, I tells ya that.

KING. Everybody should break a rule every now and then.

CAMAE. Yessir. I's agrees witcha. But not tonight ... Not tonight.

KING. Have one wit' me. Ain't nobody gonna come looking for you.

CAMAE. (*Nervously laughs.*) You the one gone get caught. Kidnapping me like this.

KING. Just one. 'Til my friend come back with my pack. (*Beat. She sighs. She takes a cigarette out and lights it. Inhales. Lets it all out. They look at each other.*)

CAMAE. You sho'll do try hard at it.

KING. Well ... you're pretty.

CAMAE. I know. Even my uncle couldn't help hisself. You have fun tonight?

KING. Fun?

CAMAE. It gotta be fun. Otherwise you wouldn't do it.

KING. Not any fun in this.

CAMAE. Sound like grand fun to me. Standin' up there in the middle of them great big old churches. People clappin' for you. Fallin' out. (*To herself.*) Must be muthafuckin' grand to mean so much to somebody. Shit, GODDAMN, must be grand. (*Beat.*) Where a needle and thread to sew up my mouth? Here I is just a-cussin' all up in front of you, Dr. Kang. I cuss worser than a sailor with the clap. Oooo, God gone get me! I'm goin' to hell just for cussin' in front of you. Fallin' straight to hell. (*He laughs.*)

KING. No ma'am, 'cordin' to your face, you done fell straight from heaven. (*King sips his coffee.*)

CAMAE. You lil' pulpit poet, you. I likes you.

KING. I likes you, too. (*The phone rings.*) Excuse me.

CAMAE. Well, I'll just be on my — (*He motions for her to stay, then puts on his "King voice."*)

KING. Dr. King, here. (*Voice shifts.*) Oh. Corrie. Yes. I did call. You didn't pick up. Oh. You were at a meeting. Oh. It went fine.

THE MOUNTAINTOP

by Katori Hall

1M, 1W

A gripping reimagination of events the night before the assassination of the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On April 3, 1968, after delivering one of his most memorable speeches, an exhausted Dr. King retires to his room at the Lorraine Motel while a storm rages outside. When a mysterious stranger arrives with some surprising news, King is forced to confront his destiny and his legacy to his people.

“Even before the first flash of lightning — and there will be plenty of that before evening’s end — an ominous electricity crackles through the opening moments of THE MOUNTAINTOP.” —**The New York Times**

“[THE MOUNTAINTOP] crackles with theatricality and a humanity more moving than sainthood.” —**New York Newsday**

“... as audacious as it is inventive ... [a] thrilling, wild, provocative flight of magical realism ... Hall keeps her audience guessing ... This is playwrighting without a net, a defiant poke in the eye of all historical conventions and political correctness ... The King that is left after Hall’s humanization project is somehow more real and urgent and whole.”
—**Associated Press**

Also by Katori Hall

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