

BUZZER

BY TRACEY SCOTT WILSON



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BUZZER
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BUZZER was commissioned and premiered by Pillsbury House Theatre (Faye Price and Noël Raymond, Co-Artistic Directors) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in February 2012. It was directed by Marion McClinton; the set design was by Dean Holtzman; the costume design was by Claire Brauch; the lighting design was by Mike Wangen; the original sound design was by C. Andrew Mayer and Katherine Horowitz; and the stage manager was Elizabeth R. MacNally. The cast was as follows:

JACKSON Namir Smallwood
SUZY Sara A. Richardson
DON Hugh Kennedy

BUZZER was subsequently produced by the Goodman Theatre (Robert Falls, Artistic Director; Roche Schulfer, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois, opening on February 8, 2014. It was directed by Jessica Thebus; the set design was by Walt Spangler; the costume design was by Birgit Rattenborg Wise; the lighting design was by John Culbert; the sound design was by Mikhail Fiksel; the dramaturg was Tanya Palmer; and the production stage manager was Kimberly Osgood. The cast was as follows:

JACKSON Eric Lynch
SUZY Lee Stark
DON Shane Kenyon

BUZZER premiered in New York City at the Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director) on March 24, 2015. It was directed by Anne Kauffman; the set design was by Laura Jellinek; the costume design was by Clint Ramos; the lighting design was by Matt Frey; the sound design was by Bray Poor; the fight director was J. David Brimmer; and the production stage manager was Buzz Cohen. The cast was as follows:

JACKSON Grantham Coleman
SUZY Tessa Ferrer
DON Michael Stahl-David

CHARACTERS

JACKSON — a black man in his mid-twenties.

SUZY — a white women in her mid-twenties.

DON — a white man in his mid-twenties.

BLACK MAN — a black man in his mid-twenties.

NOTES

The transitions between scenes should be as fluid as possible. No blackouts and no freezing during split scenes.

The sound in the play should be a combination of real and abstract. As the play goes on and Suzy becomes more frightened, sound can and should reflect her fear and paranoia. Some sound cues are indicated in the text but sound should be put in other places as well. The outside world is another character in the play and the sound design should help us get a clearer sense of the outside world and how it's seeping inside their space and psyche.

Jackson's iPhone is an essential part of his character. He is not playing games on it or answering silly texts. He is dealing with important issues at work, issues essential to his success and dreams of becoming partner. Therefore, he should never treat the phone cavalierly or casually. He should be focused and serious when answering his phone but also able to deal with the conversation at hand. He is a master multitasker. Suzy is never annoyed by Jackson's iPhone use.

BUZZER

Lights up on Jackson.

JACKSON. This used to be my neighborhood. I grew up here. Yes. It is changing for the better. Used to be horrible when I was here. Crack and heroin. Guy cooked crack right next door. Now look. A coffee shop. Two restaurants. Building a gym. None of that was here before. I assure you. *(Beat.)* I was the first person in my family to go to college. First on my block too. Yes. Exeter. Harvard. Then Harvard Law. Yes, I have. I've come a very long way. *(Beat.)* Never thought I'd be back here but ... *(Pause.)*

Jackson listens.

Nostalgia? No. Definitely not that. I don't have a lot of nice memories at all. ... It was very difficult but I worked hard, got a scholarship. Got out. *(Beat.)* I know I'm not supposed to show enthusiasm. I'm supposed to keep it cool and not let you know so that when we negotiate I can talk you down. But I can't. I want it. I want this place here. *(Beat.)* The wave is sweeping through here and before they build another coffee shop, before they build another gym, before the wave swallows up another person here, I want in. I know this neighborhood. I know what it's worth and I know what it can be. *(Beat.)* Look, I have excellent credit and references. I've been working at the same firm for five years. How much do you want? What are you asking for here?

Lights up on Suzy.

SUZY. Okay. Let me go through this beat by beat. Javon, who has been doing really well, passed his first quiz last week, was in a mood, a foul mood. And Reggie who was more enthusiastic than usual became the object of Javon's wrath. Javon grabbed Reggie's algebra book and I could see that Javon was about to make a move. Everything just slowed down, and just as Javon was about to raise the book to clock Reggie, I yelled. *(Beat.)* "Put the motherfraking

book down.” “Frak.” Not “fuck.” And Javon put the book down. And the rest of class went very well. (*Beat.*) I can understand how that can be misheard. But they’re very different words. (*Over-articulating.*) Frak. Fuck. Frak you. Fuck you. (*Beat.*) Not the same at all.

Suzy and Jackson. Suzy is carrying a cigarette.

So I thought he was going to let it pass, you know? ’Cause he’s always telling me I’m his favorite and he nominated me for that award and all. I mean we’re laughing about it right? And he’s going on and on about the good old days in the South when you could take a strap to a student, but then, just like that, he gets very official and says he’s putting me on administrative leave pending investigation.

Jackson suppresses a laugh.

I couldn’t ... Why are you laughing?

JACKSON. Get the frak off him, Javon. Get the motherfraking frak off of him.

SUZY. I might get fired.

JACKSON. You might not. It’s probably just the suspension, Suze. (*Beat.*) Will one or two weeks off be that bad. Really?

SUZY. Yes, it will suck, actually. They were just starting to understand percentages. If they get some crappy sub in there while I’m gone, they’ll be weeks behind by the time I get back. If I ever get back.

Suzy is about to light the cigarette. Jackson takes it from her.

JACKSON. Look baby, this is just a tiny setback. Students love it when their teachers get tough. By this time next year you’ll help them win some national calculus competition.

SUZY. Ha!

JACKSON. No, not just calculus. It’ll be the National Calculus/Advanced Slam Poetry Contest. They’ll have to give their math answers in verse. Like ... x plus y times pi equals: I live in the ghetto which is crappy/But adding and subtracting makes me happy.

Suzy laughs.

And after, in a shocking upset, you and all the precocious Magical Negroes win against the big, bad, white high school, you’ll write a best-selling book about it. And it will all have started, baby, ’cause you cursed out your students today.

They hug.

SUZY. I'm gonna make some calls.

JACKSON. To who? No, Suze.

SUZY. I just want to see if anybody's heard anything.

JACKSON. No, Suze. You're gonna drive yourself crazy. You just have to wait it out, baby. *(Beat.)* I got you, Suze. No matter what. You know that, right?

SUZY. I know.

They kiss. Beat.

JACKSON. But, you know, since you will have some time off I think this is a great time for us to move in together.

SUZY. *(Sarcastic.)* That is so romantic. Thanks, Jackson.

JACKSON. I'm just saying.

SUZY. Your place is too far from my job. This place is too small.

JACKSON. That place on Sutter.

SUZY. Your mom's old place?

JACKSON. No, the one down the street.

SUZY. Oh, yeah.

JACKSON. They renovated it.

SUZY. Too expensive.

JACKSON. Price went down.

SUZY. I don't want to move in with you out of panic or —

JACKSON. It's not panic.

SUZY. Or financial necessity. I want to move in because —

JACKSON. It's right. SUZY. It's right.

Yeah. I know, Suze. But it's right, baby. It is. *(Beat.)* It's not going to be like before, you know?

SUZY. Oh man, that was —

JACKSON. We were in college, Suze. When you going to forget that?

SUZY. I know it's not the same but —

JACKSON. That place was like the size of a closet. This place on Sutter is huge. It's —

Jackson's iPhone vibrates. He checks it.

SUZY. It's too expensive.

JACKSON. I made my hours. Gonna get my bonus.

SUZY. Jackson, you know I don't want you footing the bill for everything.

JACKSON. I bought it.

SUZY. You bought it? What?

He puts iPhone down.

JACKSON. I bought it. For you. For us.

Suze starts to protest.

You're never gonna make a tenth of what I make so let's stop discussing the money issue okay? It's what we talked about, Suze. Going back. Giving back. Saving all the little Jacksons and Jacksonettes out there. I'm serious about this, Suze. Serious about us.

SUZY. I'm serious about us too, baby.

JACKSON. Okay, then ... *(Pause.)* Suze, will you please —

An excited Suzy squeals.

SUZY. Oh my God, Jackson!

Jackson takes a key ring out of his pocket.

JACKSON. Will you please come see the apartment with me? See if you like it.

SUZY. Oh. God ... I thought you were gonna ...

Suzy points to her ring finger.

JACKSON. What? No, Suze. No. *(Beat.)* That will look more like this.

Jackson gets on one knee.

Or this.

Jackson makes a puppy-dog face and gets on both knees.

Or this.

Jackson picks Suzy up and swings her around. Then we are in the fabulous apartment on Sutter.

Newly renovated wood floors. Huge windows. Natural sunlight. High ceilings. New appliances. And two ... *(Putting up two fingers.)* Two. Walk-in closets in the bedroom. And Suze ...

Jackson leads her offstage.

Wait for it. Wait for it.

Jackson opens a door.

SUZY. Oh. My. God.

JACKSON. I had them install a washer/dryer. So what do you say babe?

SUZY. This place is amazing, Jackson. *(Beat.)* But I don't want to move in with you just because of a great place, a great space. I want to move in with you because it's right for us. I want —

JACKSON. It is right, Suze.

Suzy starts to talk. Jackson interrupts.

I know it might not seem like it now.

Jackson takes Suzy over to the window.

But this neighborhood is changing. Fast.

Points out the window.

They're building a café there.

SUZY. Jackson.

JACKSON. A new gym down the street.

SUZY. I —

JACKSON. I'm telling you. In ten years this whole place will be unrecognizable. Cafés and yoga centers all around.

SUZY. Baby ...

JACKSON. There are two gay guys across the hall Suze. And another —

SUZY. I know it's a great investment.

JACKSON. Then what?

SUZY. Then nothing. I want to do it.

JACKSON. You do?

SUZY. Yes. I do. You didn't give me a chance to ...

Jackson kisses Suzy. He's elated.

I love you.

JACKSON. I love you more.

They kiss again.

Wow.

SUZY. Wow.

SUZY. We're really doing this huh?

JACKSON. We are.

SUZY. My sister is going to go batshit when she sees this place.

JACKSON. Ha! She's never coming here, Suze.

SUZY. Oh. You're right.

JACKSON. Not until they build an artisanal whiskey bar.

SUZY. A *local* artisanal whiskey bar. (*Beat.*) None of our friends are going to come here.

JACKSON. Yes, they will.

SUZY. Baby, we wouldn't come here if we didn't live here.

JACKSON. We'll make friends, Suze. That crack ho on the corner seems very friendly.

BUZZER

by Tracey Scott Wilson

3M, 1W

Jackson, an upwardly-mobile black attorney, has just bought an apartment in a transitioning neighborhood in Brooklyn. He sees the potential of his old neighborhood, as does his white girlfriend Suzy ... at first. When Jackson's childhood friend Don leaves rehab to crash with them, the trio quickly becomes trapped between the tensions inside their own home and the dangers that may lurk outside.

"Skillful ... [a] slow-burning, thought-provoking drama ... "

—**The New York Times**

"[Tracey Scott Wilson] does not write diatribes or position papers. Race is not a national conversation but an inner turmoil ... in an argument about something else or in a split-second decision about opening the building's door to a stranger. The fact that the main gentrifier here is black turns the usual view of the subject inside out: Can one gentrify one's own home?"

—**New York Magazine**

"Issues of class, race, and the politics surrounding a community in flux are pulled into an engaging debate about a term ['gentrification'] whose overuse has zapped it of nearly all meaning. ... The resulting snapshot is an interesting one, illuminating the hidden dimensions of this cultural transformation that realtors rarely include in their property tours."

—**TheaterMania.com**

Also by Tracey Scott Wilson
THE GOOD NEGRO
THE STORY

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